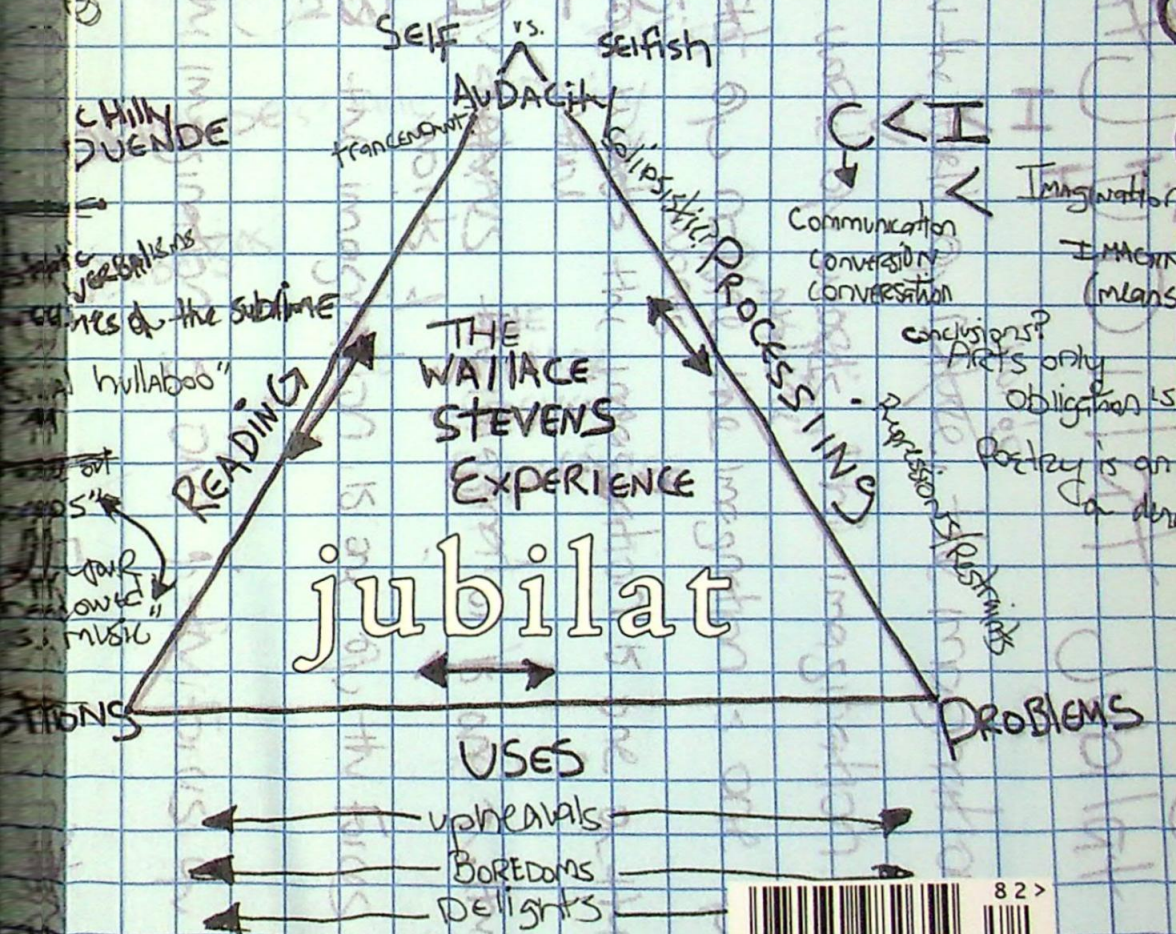


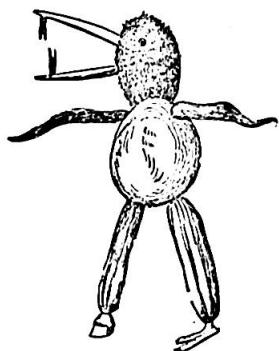
"THE AUDACITY OF IMAGINATION"

NOTES FOR AN ESSAY ON WALLACE STEVENS



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TERRANCE HAYES & EVIE SHOCKLEY, EDS.

Cover art by Terrance Hayes



FLAGELLIFORM 65

Shane Book

There been a long-term betrayal. You could tell
by a certain fitchy smell. A brotha could tell.
Somehow by hook or by boat or by footwork
or by the trail of leaking beta particles
there been a spectacular spit-shiningly precise
decay. Who/when was one question, and one
question was protected by a layer of asbestos,
a decagon fence, a constant squall of laws—
law of Signs, law of Cosigns, third law of
Thumbtracks, law of the Jungle Bunny,
and the long-neglected Black Code and centering
it all, the impossibility of Absolute Zero, bro.
Still, it cold. It made a brotha want to be sure
to get his words' worth, his ass blackened ass
movin'. Soon it be night and then the equational
epitaphs be dictated and then it be like a crime
scene, the masses of botfly larvae wiggling
the surface of the epidermis, and a faint scent
of fission. Who knew then what the mission
would be knew the weaponry of his so-called
clan and best be ready to wash hisself in the ritual
dried leaf bath and resist. The impulse to gag
or the impulse to group, impurity as information,
information as leash or history or a dollop
of dream dispensed by a pair of lazy tongs,
that much hisself knew. Fucks hisself grandly
with a pair of lazy tongs, he do-dee-do-dee-do.

In the middle, the cleft, where it don't matter.
He riding that swishy fissure like a wish-you-
were-here. He a bad muther—shut-yo-mouth.
He licked it once. He liked it. He trying hard to—

FLAGELLIFORM 66

there's a blue-eyed devil winking in my soup in my soup
there's a blue-eyed devil thinking in my bread in my lead
someone silky-suspect-smirky been sleeping in my biped
sleeve

too long too long
Oh someone been
way too long

[tuned in] A furious theory down over the bay

One may
be motive for my strong
away

I am not ten feet tall

I am not out of my lead Out

A shuddering it out: Man cannot live as pure bread alone
Lawd

I am not eat pure bread alone I am not man

Bothers me there ain't no plan for them peeping neither
Them

Over the wall Them there Something vaguely
Ostrogothic 'bout them eye

String string go the sing in a skinny sonic box

Theme song:—theirs

Theory song:—theirs too

Waddamygonna

Why am I a goner
do

Toolbox:—ours

In tool box

by order of tool shed junta

no tunes

Inventory:

pack of tongue depressors

3 caps of osteoblast inhibitor

length of jury-rig

bottle of muscle

vast array of a cloudy *jus naturale*

Blessed Cesspool deep in his drawer
shuckin' around

shuckin' and rootin' and

Messed little Jigga-boo out of sightly
paws

asleep on those

Blessed Nigger-less sky

Blessed gone-Sambo
shiny crampons

gimme room to bereave *squirrelly* *purely*
gimme room to keep on *creepin' on* *with my*

Blessed faded Spook

gimme room to slam

Their in again

Sticking their Musicks good

This ain't good

Ain't good at all for my

rib rigged up with baling wire obscuring the
entrance to my

chambre à toucher

There just ain't no way [in this age and day] for either

What rhyme

with Mahler?

POEM

Rachel Abramowitz

On one side, the man with great talent but no feeling.
On the other, a man who falls out of the ceilings of books
To reach his grounded temperament. Sunday, and the phlox
Are descendents of last Sunday, and the commas the descendants
Of feeling whose great man has shut the door on them.
These are not times for talent. Clearly the spill upon the table
Has taken centuries to remain exactly as it is.
A message from the air, then. The man with his talent
Goes to bed like a candle, waits quietly.
He thinks of the beetles in his garden, how they
With their visible skeletons hurt each other less.
It could end like this. But the other man whose feeling is a skeleton
Is peeling an orange and I do not know what he thinks.

ANTHROPOLOGY

Maureen McLane

why am I not preserving
the yanomami language
or speakers of same
or learning a lusty romance tongue
the smell of the sea
mediterraneanizing open vocables
split down the middle
by dirt?
o the language game uh huh. I played
the lion, saw that I won, sd
hello. He like unto himself
yawned/roared
as the case required.
a daggered paw ripped off my face
the savannah no longer so peaceful—

all this was caught by the cameras
the intrepid documentarian brought
in the jeep.

bleep bleep went the machine
begging for love
thought the anthropomorphizers.
and right they were: desire slimed
everything.
how stupid to forget the objects
would one day rise up

"IT MUST CHANGE": WALLACE STEVENS AND THE DIGRESSIVE ARS POETICA

Srikanth Reddy

In the autumn of 1937, a visitor to the offices of the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, leafing through the pages of that institution's venerable house organ, *The Hartford Agent*, might have come across a wry little reflection, penned by a newly minted vice president in the agency's Bonding Division, on the subject of "Insurance and Social Change." Toward the end of this commentary, the author—who had, like his fictional contemporary Walter Mitty, excavated from countless ordinary evenings in bourgeois Connecticut a rather extraordinary imaginative cosmos—draws our attention to a surprisingly stable market for securities in this period of economic and social upheaval:

In a late number of the Accident Company's Confidential Bulletin, it was said that "Cemeteries have been found by a number of offices to be a very definite market for the Hartford's All Risk Securities Policy." This observation would apply to the Hartford's policies generally under Communism and, to some extent, under Fascism. (Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, 796)

A grave irony rests in the fact that cemeteries, their inhabitants blissfully oblivious of both accident and indemnity, require coverage against flood, fire, and sundry other acts of God. The living must underwrite the dead.¹ In his alter ego as debonair aesthete, Wallace Stevens had articulated an earlier version of this custodial imperative in his modernist version of Gray's

"Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard": "Mow the grass in the cemetery, darkies," declaims the poet at the opening of "Two at Norfolk," a lyric added to the 1931 edition of *Harmonium* (92). The decidedly patronizing tone of this speaker's address to the "darkies" tending the burial grounds—like the unspeakable signifier lodged at the heart of the title "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery"—illustrates how ongoing social upheavals surrounding the question of race continue to haunt the American necropolis in this writer's literary imagination.² With the engineers of Stalin's Great Purge making a burial site of the Karelia Forest and the Buchenwald camp now fully operational in the beech woods Goethe once so loved to sketch, the ossuaries of Europe must have seemed a world apart from the manicured New England cemeteries of Wallace Stevens's literary perambulations. But this poet-executive mordantly notes the posthumous solidarity of those who dwell beyond change on both sides of the Atlantic.³ The dead of the American capitalist, the Russian Communist, and the European Fascist must be covered alike. They file their claim, as it were, regardless of the regimes ceaselessly changing above.

Only a year earlier, Stevens had been subjected to some fairly trenchant criticism for his studied indifference toward the drama of social change unfolding on a global stage throughout this period. "Of course," writes Stanley Burnshaw in his infamous review of Stevens and the now largely forgotten Haniel Long, "neither poet is weakening the class in power—as yet they are potential allies as well as potential enemies" (366). With the Second World War brewing in Europe, labor unrest at home, and an unprecedented economic depression deepening across the globe, this inscrutable poet—"as yet" neither ally nor enemy to readers of *The New Masses*—remains aloof from questions of social change, like the dead haunting the margins of his commentary in *The Hartford Agent*. Mistrustful of ideology, Stevens prefers to frame his own Utopian inquiries in a theological light from the outset of his literary career, asking in "Sunday Morning": "Is there no change of death in paradise? / Does ripe fruit never

fall?" (55). While acknowledging that Stevens's imaginative universe is far from "an idiot's paradise," Burnshaw—who, "in his darker moments" as a Marxist believer, "would confront his own misgivings about the glory of the life-to-come in the stateless utopia"—faults this writer for a failure to advocate change in a world destabilized by class conflict (363, 359). Bypassing both the romantic tree and the modernist machine as figures for poetry, the young radical imagines the Stevensian lyric as a frozen thing, "separated from its kernel of fire and allowed to settle, cool off and harden in the poet's mind until it emerges as a strange amazing crystal" (42).⁴ But the strange and amazing thing about crystals—as any student who has peered at one ramifying under the microscope knows—is that they do, however slowly, change. Ten years and an unimaginable war later, allowed to settle, cool off, and harden in the poet's mind, Burnshaw's crystal provides Stevens with an image not of the poem, but, rather, of the world. Returning at twilight from a lecture at the Sorbonne, the speaker of *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* pauses "in a gilded street" to lovingly address by name a "fluent mundo" which will, at last, have "stopped revolving except in crystal" (351).

No self-respecting political radical will, of course, be content with a revolution in crystal. "Realists have been bitter at the inanity of Pope's 'Whatever is is right,'" Burnshaw complains, "but Stevens plunges ahead to the final insolence: 'For realists, what is is what should be'" (364). Pope's theodicy does indeed reflect a desire to insure his Enlightenment England, shaken by political revolution a century earlier, against further social change. It should not surprise us, then, that Stevens's revision of Pope along the axis of "is"—"whatever is is right" crystallizing into the even more rigid chiasmus of "what is is what"—should so infuriate Burnshaw's revolutionary sensibilities.⁵ Adding one last fillip to the final insolence, however, Stevens cannot resist rebuking the young critic a year afterwards, in a poem from *Owl's Clover* titled "Mr. Burnshaw and the Statue." As the poem opens, an imaginary Burnshaw, dandled on the author's knee like a ventriloquist's dummy, utters revolutionary chiasmuses:

The thing is dead . . . Everything is dead
Except the future. Always everything
That is is dead except what ought to be. (570)

At first glance, these radical slogans seem utterly anathema to Pope's conservative royalist rhetoric. But the Marxist lament regarding commodification—"The thing is dead"—initiates a curious rhyme with the classic call-and-response of monarchical succession: *The thing is dead ... Long live the thing*. The historical progression from Pope's "inanity" to Stevens's "insolence" to the cry of the imaginary Burnshaw, then, maps a curiously circumscribed grammar of social change across the poetics of modernity:

A) Whatever is is right

B) What is is what should be

C) Always everything that is is dead except what ought to be

Faced with this multiple-choice problem, Stevens would, of course, choose option D: "none of the above."⁶ For this interrogator of "the the," the common denominator "is is" belies a common failure of the conservative, the realist, and the radical alike to construct a poetics capable of registering the imperatives of change.

No other passage from American poetry of the twentieth century confronts the shifting imperative to change—the world, the poem, or one's life—so squarely as the lyric sequence at the heart of Stevens's *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*: "It Must Change." For readers sympathetic to Burnshaw's point of view, the grammar of Stevens' motto will seem incomplete. Change, from this perspective, ought to be transitive: the supreme fiction must change class consciousness, or the distribution of capital, or any number of other unsatisfactory states of affairs. The intransitivity of Stevens's formulation, on the other hand, indicates that the grammatical

subject "it"—the supreme fiction itself—must change. But how may one imagine such a mercurial fiction? Stevens' poem is the cry of this occasion: "We say / This changes and that changes," writes the author:

Thus the constant

Violets, doves, girls, bees and hyacinths
Are inconstant objects of inconstant cause
In a universe of inconstancy. (337)

In this Heraclitean universe, an "old seraph" haunts the public gardens in spring. Descended from the highest angelic order in the Dantean cosmology of this American *Commedia*, Stevens's seraph might at first seem indifferent toward change, like the dead of New England or their comrades across the ocean in Europe. But even an angel is subject to time (this one, once young, is now "old") and the mutability of moods: "The seraph / Is satyr in Saturn according to his thoughts." "Parcel-gilded," this figure resembles both the worldly Stevens himself on the way home from a day's shopping and the buzzing workers, gilt with pollen, he so studiously observes in the park: "The bees came booming as if they had never gone, / As if hyacinths had never gone." But the fiction of changelessness pivots upon our wishful construction "as if." By the end of the canto, this dream fractures. "The bees came booming," the poet begins to repeat himself as if out of fixed habit, only to find that "as if" will no longer bear the weight of refrain: "As if—The pigeons clatter in the air." Change overtakes the world of the poem, just as pigeons overtake Stevens's fugitive bees in their season, before sinking themselves downward to darkness, on extended wings.

Perhaps no writer since Ovid has so obsessively documented the metamorphoses of our fluent mundo as Stevens. "Of bodies chang'd to various forms, I sing" writes the Latin poet at the outset of his history of the world, chronicling the ceaseless transformation of heroes into

constellations, queens into waterfalls, and immortals into echoes (3). By the final canto of "It Must Change," we find our modernist Ovid seated on a park bench, viewing a pond "in which swans / were seraphs, were saints, were changing essences" (343). If seraph becomes swan over the course of the sequence, this quiet metamorphosis subtends a work of art which—like an egg hatching into an instar, an instar forming a chrysalis, and, from this chrysalis, emerging a winged creature—itself undergoes radical transformations from one canto to the next. Here we have the old seraph's vigil in the park; a cartoon-president's oafish fiats against time; an ekphrasis on the statue of the General Du Puy; a Whitmanian meditation on opposites; an elegy for a planter in the tropics; the wild song of a Shelleyan sparrow; the poet alone among lilacs by moonlight; the failed epithalamion of Ozymandias and Nanzia Nunzio; a modernist *De vulgari eloquentia* which seeks to reconcile "the imagination's Latin" with our "lingua franca et jocundissima"; and an eventual return to Stevens's beloved park bench, his "Theater of Trope" (343). Where Ovid remains bound by the frame of narration in his book of changes, Stevens moves freely between story and song, epithalamion and elegy, satire and poetics in this carnivalesque text. "It follows that to change modes is to change the world," observes the poet in his "Conversation with Three Women of New England," establishing the grounds for his own form of literary activism (470). Thus, within Stevens's rhetoric of literary forms, description may be revelation, but digression is revolution.

Framed by the famous slogans "It Must Be Abstract," "It Must Change," and "It Must Give Pleasure," *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* stages a curious intervention in an age of revolutionary manifestos. "An exceptionally charged genre, poetically and politically," the manifesto in this period "becomes the place where the most pressing issues and questions faced by twentieth-century art, including the relation to the audience, to society, to politics, indeed, the whole conception of what an artwork is or should be, are being dogmatically as well as symptomatically worked out"

observes Martin Puchner in his wide-ranging study *Poetry of the Revolution* (71). Perhaps the most pronounced formal symptom of the manifesto as a genre is its emphatically linear exposition. Dryly claiming that "I am on principle against manifestos," the irreverent subversive Tristan Tzara acknowledges this aspect of the form in his *Dada Manifesto* of 1918:

To proclaim a manifesto you have to want: A.B.C., thunder against 1, 2, 3, lose your patience and sharpen your wings to conquer and spread a's, b's, c's little and big, sign, scream, swear, arrange the prose in a form of absolute and irrefutable evidence, prove your non-plus-ultra.... (149)

"To impose your A.B.C. is a natural thing," observes Tzara, and "therefore regrettable." From Marinetti's *Manifesto of Futurism* on the Fascist Right to Tatlin's *Theses on the Bolshevik Left*, however, the trope of enumeration has deeply informed the manifesto genre regardless of the author's political creed.⁷ This sequential compulsion aligns the manifesto with a teleological poetics of purpose within the period: "Manifestos tend to present themselves as mere means to an end," writes Puchner, "demanding to be judged not by their rhetorical or literary merits—their poetry—but by their ability to change the world" (2). Indeed, the proliferation of manifestos throughout Europe and the United States in the first half of the twentieth century effected a profound instrumentalization of aesthetics within modernist culture. Breton's *Second Manifesto*, for instance, served as "a disciplinary instrument" which "rid surrealism of suspected renegade members, most famously Artaud and Georges Bataille, while also defending the movement against the attacks of the Third International" (Puchner, 186). In the hands of a literary Robespierre, this cultural form, like the guillotine and oubliette of a prior era, can be employed to both discipline and punish.

The manifesto, with apologies to Clausewitz, may be regarded as a continuation of the *ars poetica* by other means. Both genres expound an aesthetics, but there the resemblance ends. "Set up like a battlefield" in Mary Ann Caws's formulation, the militant form of the manifesto demolishes the collegial fireside atmosphere established by Horace in his original *Ars Poetica* two thousand years earlier (xx). Thus *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*—though composed in an era of social change—remains couched within what must have struck radicals like Burnshaw as an outmoded Horatian tradition. Like the classical poet addressing his avuncular epistle to the young Piso, Stevens counsels his own imaginary ingénue on the genesis of invention: "Begin, ephebe, by perceiving the idea / Of this invention, this invented world, / The inconceivable idea of the sun" (329). But where the Latin *auctoritas* outlines his poetics in an orderly fashion—progressing from questions of unity and harmony (lines 1–37) to the aims of the writer (lines 38–72) to tradition's dictates (73–118), etcetera—our skeptical modernist comically capsizes beneath the burden of aesthetic instruction:

There's a meditation there, in which there seems

To be an evasion, a thing not apprehended or
Not apprehended well. Does the poet
Evade us, as in a senseless element? (343)

Evasion, of course, is precisely the charge levelled by Burnshaw against Stevens' work: "One can rarely speak surely of Stevens' ideas," complains the polemicist (364). Though the eponymous subject of any *ars poetica* is of course poetry itself, the speaker of *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* continually discovers that detours from aesthetics "give pleasure" as well, ranging from the genealogy of religion to the postcolonial epithalamion to the drama of domesticity within High Anglicanism in the poem's final sequence (346–8). Indeed, few and far between are the cantos phrased in a

Horatian diction—"The poem refreshes life" (330), "The poem goes from the poet's gibberish" (342), "To sing jubilas at exact, accustomed times" (344)—in Stevens's evasive work. Horace, who advises aspiring ephebes "to say here and now what's to be said here and now," would be bemused no doubt by this twentieth-century *ars poetica* which so playfully avoids mentioning poetry (163).

In a lecture on "The Irrational Element in Poetry" delivered at Harvard's campus in the winter of 1936, Stevens refers to "the difficulty of sticking to the true subject" of any literary enterprise (785). *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* makes its central artistic virtue — "It Must Change" — of this difficulty. Changing subjects from one canto to the next, this mercurial *ars poetica* presents its ephebe with a kaleidoscopic landscape of the imagination:

v

On a blue island in a sky-wide water
The wild orange trees continued to bloom and to bear,
Long after the planter's death . . .

vi

Bethou me, said sparrow, to the crackled blade . . .

vii

After a lustre of the moon, we say
We have not the need of any paradise,
We have not the need of any seducing hymn.
It is true. Tonight the lilacs . . .

On her trip around the world, Nanzia Nunzio
 Confronted Ozymandias . . . (339–342)

Though *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*—like the manifestos it formally deconstructs—professes to teach us poetics by numbers, the roman numerals of this sequence deliberately fail to map Stevens's aesthetics onto the orderly coordinates of purposeful exposition.⁸ One never knows what will come next in this digressive ars poetica. In his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant famously argues that art is not purposeful, but, rather, "purposive" by nature; this formulation, transported to the sphere of rhetoric, might very well double as a description of Stevens's discursive strategy in *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* (173). Digression is discourse which, while displaying a purposive sense, avoids speaking "to the purpose." Changing the subject within this fugitive treatise, then, Stevens deftly evades the instrumentalization of art which governed aesthetic theory in modernist literary culture. "How easily the blown banners change to wings," writes the poet in his aubade to George Santayana, noting the instability of our political imperatives "on the horizons of perception" (432). The ideal poem—the elusive yet supreme fiction envisioned in Stevens' ars poetica—would register both the epic banners of historical conflict and the distinct shades cast by fluttering things with equal care, a mutable lyric which, like *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* itself, makes changing the subject its purposive method.

"A teleological consideration of the world does quite splendidly in certain areas," Kant observes in the final volume of his critical trilogy, but art, the philosopher concludes, lies beyond ends (325). Over the digressive course of *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*, the manifesto's militant will to power undergoes an Ovidian transformation into a provisional yet categorical "will to change" (344). Stevens' critique of the poetics of purpose does not

entail a quarrel with the 1930s radical Left exclusively, but, rather, with all who would impose any utopian aesthetics whatsoever upon lyric writing. In the unpublished manuscript of "Romance for a Demoiselle Lying in the Grass," for instance, the poet composes a veiled parody of Walt Whitman's beloved figure for an idealized American society:

It is grass.

It is monotonous. (551)

Lampooning Whitman's invocation of a triumphant American imperium, this lyric speaker ponderously declaims that "I invoke the monotony of monotonies / Free from images and change," only to collapse into an operatic surrender by the poem's end: "Clasp me, / Delicatest machine." Stevens's critique of utopianism, then, rests upon an abiding skepticism with regard to the monotonies of paradise itself. Indeed, this writer's own political beliefs seem to have been in perpetual motion throughout the writer's life: "I hope I am headed left," Stevens once confided in a letter that would have taken Burnshaw by surprise, "but there are lefts and lefts" (*Letters*, 456). Both the Communist Left and the Fascist Right represent fixed coordinates which lock down the political imaginary for a poet who prefers to dwell in transition.⁹ Stevens instead fashions his world from lower-case lefts and rights which—like the plural lefts and rights of one who finds herself facing in various directions while traversing a labyrinthine topography—reconfigure themselves depending upon the momentary orientation of a moving center.¹⁰ This is why, in the prefatory lines to *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*, the wartime poet locates peace "in the uncertain light of single, certain truth, / Equal in living changingness to the light / In which I meet you, in which we sit at rest, / For a moment in the central of our being" (329). Though he is widely regarded as a political centrist, Stevens views even the fragile political center of the period as a fixed—and therefore false—coordinate for situating oneself in the world. Making a dwelling place of an adjective, this elusive countryman elects to meet his "you" in the intangible "central" of our collective being.

"And do not call it fixity," Eliot cautions us when, like Dante's Beatrice, he escorts his reader to "the still point of the turning world" (177, emphases added). Yet, Eliot's "the . . . the" marks a subtle reification of this conservative's *axis mundi*. A cosmology set into motion not upon the nominal center of Eliot's "bedded axle-tree" but, rather, upon the adjectival axis of Stevens' "central" would best be described as "a moving contour, a change not quite completed" (351). All of Stevens' work following *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* endeavors to capture the crystalline revolutions of this still turning world. In *Ariel and the Police*, Frank Lentricchia beautifully describes the poet's late verse:

What he is writing is a kind of pre-poetry, a tentative approach to the poem, an enactment of desire not as a state of mind, with all the inert implications of the phrase "state of mind," but as movement, and not movement in a straight line, as if he could see the end of the journey, but a meandering sort of motion: desire as improvisational action which gives us the sense of starting, stopping, changing direction, revising the phrase, refining the language, drafting the poem and keeping the process of drafting all there because the finished thing can't be had. (202)

Like Kant outlining his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Stevens lays the groundwork for his valedictory "pre-poetry" in *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*. Deconstructing not only the poetics of purpose which propels the manifesto movement within the period but the orderly Horatian aesthetics of the classical *ars poetica* tradition as well, Stevens underwrites a new and provisional sense of literary form in modernist lyric writing. Continuously changing the subject within this remarkable *ars poetica*, moreover, Stevens opens the door for digressive authors with such differing approaches to the political as Lyn Hejinian and John Ashbery in postwar American poetry. (The emphatic radicalism of a text

such as *My Life* and the wry resignation of collections like *A Worldly Country* both find expression through a common poetics of digression). A poetics of change, then, serves no particular political ethos exclusively. Indeed, calls for "change" have memorably anchored political campaigns for both the red and the blue parties in this country's latest presidential election, illustrating the mutability and elasticity of this trope within our political unconscious. Conservatives and liberals alike reinscribe variations of Stevens' motto "It Must Change" on bumper stickers, pins, and signs staked to their front lawns, but the digressive *ars poetica* declines to propound any particular form or agenda for art. In its fugitive contour, we glimpse one method for projecting the shifting coordinates of ourselves onto the uneven terrain of a changing world.

NOTES

- 1 "At first this quote from the house organ looks like an in-house joke," writes Joseph Harrington in his essay "Wallace Stevens and the Poetics of National Insurance" (*American Literature* 67 [March 1995]: 95–114), "but in fact cemeteries are vulnerable to accidental damage by fire, flood, tornado, or earthquake. Stevens' point, however, is that All-Risk policies do not cover loss due to deterioration or depreciation; and cemeteries, or at any rate their residents, are beyond the need for that kind of coverage" (100).
- 2 For further reading on Stevens and the question of race, see Rachel Blau DuPlessis's article "Darken Your Speech: Racialized Cultural Work of Modernist Poets," from a collection of essays edited by Aldon Nielsen under the title *Reading Race in American Poetry: "An Area of Act"* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 43–83.
- 3 In Stevens' poem on Norfolk Cemetery, one permanent resident, for whom "the moon was always in Scandinavia," lies peacefully alongside a skeletal neighbor who, in his lifetime, dutifully "praised Johann Sebastian, as he should." By contrast, the labor of the "darkies" and the passion of the young lovers "who come to the darkness" of this secluded spot—"He for her burning breast and she for his arms"—mark the subjection of the living to change, and their exclusion from the fixed *socius* underfoot (92).
- 4 Indeed, "reading this poetry becomes a venture in crystallography" in Burnshaw's critical imagination (364–5).
- 5 The final insolence, however, begins with a qualifying clause: "For realists, what is is what should be." Earlier in "The Comedian as the Letter C," Stevens had described his bildungsroman's protagonist, Crispin, as no mere "pricking realist" (32). And in an unpublished lyric called "Anecdote of the Abnormal," Stevens hails "Crispin-valet, Crispin-saint!" as "The exhausted realist" who "beholds / His tattered manikin arise, / Tuck in the straw, / And stalk the skies" (551). From the scarecrow Crispin to the "shaken realist" of "Esthétique du Mal," this propagandist for the imagination paints the priesthood of the real in an unflattering light.

- 6 Instructing his Muses that "It is only enough / To live incessantly in change," Stevens's own utterance only regains its customary rhetorical authority once he resumes speaking in propria persona in this text (573).
- 7 Tatlin's final thesis illustrates how deeply embedded the manifesto is within a numerical logic:

The world of numbers, as the nearest to the architectonics of art, gives us: (1) confirmation of the existence of the inventor; (2) a complete organic connection of the individual with the collective numeral. There is no error in Khlebnikov's example. (1) "In a series of natural numbers, prime numbers, indivisible and non-recurring, are scattered. Each of these numbers carries with it its new numerical world...." (238)

- 8 Compare the utterly unpredictable sequence of Stevensian scenes, for example, with the expository progression of Marinetti's numbered sentences:
 1. We intend to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness.
 2. Courage, audacity, and revolt will be the essential elements of our poetry.
 3. Up to now literature has exalted a pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep. We intend to exalt aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer's stride, the mortal leap, the punch and slap. (41)
- 9 Recent work such as Alan Filreis's *Modernism from Right to Left* seeks to complicate the binary opposition between left and right within the period: "the main point of Burnshaw's criticism, and of Stevens's long poem-response, was to propose continual interideological struggle as a model for negotiating opposing positions *that were themselves shifting*" (221).
- 10 In his *Prolegomena*, Kant examines the mystery of left versus right as coordinates for orienting oneself in the world:

I cannot put such a hand as is seen in the mirror in the place of its original: for if the original was a right hand, the hand in the mirror is a left hand . . . Here are no inner differences that any understanding could think; and yet the differences are inner as far as the senses tell us, for the left hand cannot be enclosed in the same boundaries as the right (they cannot be congruent) notwithstanding all their mutual equality and similarity; the glove of the one hand cannot be used on the other. What is the solution? These objects are not representations of the things as they are in themselves and as a pure understanding would know them, but sensible intuitions, i.e. appearances, the possibility of which rests on the relation of certain things, unknown in themselves, to something else, namely our sensibility. (42)

from VOYAGER

Srikanth Reddy

The pendulum swings.

In the human eye the structure of a river states itself.

Henceforth illusion means the projection of the river as *river*.

Existence matters to the local population.

They build a country over the years within its channels.

Therefore Jonah was uncertain of the task.

One.

He envisaged Lebanon in the night.

A moral individual has to shape his conduct as one formal gesture.

The river lives in a mobile home.

It was difficult to see the falsehood of language.

Stop.

Now begin.

Begin in Judaea and Samaria.

Begin with a map of the area marking all the villages upon the bank of the river.

Begin constituting a process in detail.

In the library he studied the differences between nations.

One.

The extent to which his political philosophy was marked by faith was formal.

A textbook of peace should terminate the soul.

Making cannot be judged against a standard of the state.

Approach the fire.

Two.

The observer of the fire might credit creation.

Three.

Is power materially contingent?

It cannot be.

Fate will inevitably figure the end.

Peace can never be.

To think is to honor a state of psychological failure.

Write a tragedy.

In the history of nations, the state was brought to birth by the decision
of the subject.

The epic is only part of the story.

Consider what might have happened in a world of rational men.

Two.

Men make the desert bloom.

The fruits are driven by need. The seeds relentlessly open.

The voice demands a form and the form bounds the world.

Bear the seeds gravely.

Each must play part in the general lamentation.

BLACK POET WRITES HIS WIFE, 2007

Lenard D. Moore

Dear Elizabeth,

I arrived almost lunchtime
at the Hartford/Springfield Airport.
When I stepped outside
the temperature felt half
what your fever was.
It was the first time
this traveling year
that chill cut clean
to my black man bones.
It wasn't too long
before random rain started
messing with my head
as if I were a canvas
out in the drizzled weather.
The sun hasn't seen me
nor have I seen it—
just a simple sky all day.
This fall foliage is jumping
like the juke joints
I used to tell you about,
the ones where my sister and I
won chicken sandwiches dancing
against anybody who dared
while bass bossed the walls,

leaving the tweeters frenzied.
I wish you could see this town,
all red, yellow, orange.
Please don't worry.
I am taking myself back
to Raleigh, in four days—
your birthday, our anniversary.
Well, I got to write a poem now.
Keep that sugar all bottled up
like that molasses
I told you I grew up on.
I know I'll dream you here
as sure as your skin is brown.

Your husband,
George

TREE IN THE EAR

Ange Mlinko

We parked at 15th St between 7th and 8th Aves.
After lunch on 7th Ave and 14th St
we walked as far as 5th St then turned and walked down to 5th Ave.

Then turned again toward 7th Ave at Garfield.
Walked past 8th Ave
to Prospect Park West, veered
back toward the 3rd St playground. Continued onward to 15th St,

where we hung a right and stopped at the car.
During this time,
B. told me of his superior canal dehiscence.
He felt a fullness in the ears;
he could hear the vibrations of his own voice in his head;
his heartbeat;
and on bad days, the nystagmic motion of his eyeballs as he read.
In Tullio's phenomenon, the sound of music instigates vertigo.
Rilke: ... *da schufst du ihnen Tempel im Gehör.*
I felt for him, even as I sensed
he was turning into the hero of an allegory
in which even to sympathize (like strings)
was to add to the vibrations which were his torment.
Fenestration is an obsolete surgery.
... *und machte sich ein Bett in meinem Ohr.*

~

We stopped at the flea market
where old books caught my eye:
a Russian primer, a Portuguese primer,
and a German primer.
I already had a few words
of Russian and Portuguese under my belt
(obsolete: *baldric*), strange as the combination was,
which owed itself
to particular historic circumstances—
a grandchild of DPs—
and wondered if the third term comprised a sort of cipher.

Interrupting my reverie was B.,
who noticed a copy of *Invisible Cities*
which he claimed was not only his favorite book,
but one that he had
superstitiously not finished,
so he could continue to look forward to it
indefinitely.

If there were a word for this,
it would be a German word.
Like the leafy promenade
that divided the belle epoque mansions
from Olmstead's park: *boulevard*.
Where I had strolled with my son
for the first three years of his life,
but which he no longer remembered,
for that cherub no longer existed.
O hoher Baum im Ohr!



The Conservatory
is just a fieldstone house built early last century.
We could hear the strains
of children at their lessons
through heavy doors.
Standing in the crosscurrents
of melodies emanating from unseen lodgings,
we wavered.

"Ear training" followed,
as the music teacher strummed
a little meadow for gamboling,
strummed a little strand of trees,
strummed a hoofbeat of deer
then taking out a glockenspiel
glissando'd a little stream,
glissando'd a bit of pixie dust.
"Spin. Pedal. Skip. Turn," she commanded
through bars of melody
measuring response times,
gauging the ability
to attend.

Glockenspiel, but also
other exotic words: *harpsichord*,
harmonium, *lute*,
dwelling now beyond the general orbit
of the ear, here shyly coaxed back
to greet the children,
as fauna emerging from a *bosage*
into this ephemeral glade.

NO SHIP, NO CREW, NO FATE

Lauren Haldeman

I live north of the electric company
and carry antifreeze along the power lines.
It is cold. Out here a deer is watching me, standing buck and
frozen solid. Slowly his antlers pull ice from the air.
This is the way it will end. One squirrel
barking through the fog with a clipped wing
in his mouth. One fawn in the brake with an antler
growing from his snout. Tusks hanging from fir trees
stained red from last fall. Icy nectar caught
in drips. I chuck the antifreeze container
towards the distant trucks. Woolly-stomached things out there
hide inside the bark. Tonight the forest tinkles.
The sky twinkles. I make graceful strides. I take out my knife.
A blueness spills out. It burns the snow.

PATAPHYSICAL SNOWFLAKES

Ted Mathys

All snowmen
in Brooklyn

have plastic forks for arms

and suffer the public
opprobrium of being

eleven inches tall
fronting the bile
of Gowanus Canal

from sleet-wet

front stoops,
the predicate of desire.

to witness the collective
corpus subjected
to the elemental joke

and reflected,

however
pathetically,
however

in miniature,

in an irrepressible
event of nature,

except for those who've outgrown
their fallen ontic realm,

are human-high
and exactly one

in number, at the foot of a slow
white declivity in the Nethermead,
surrounded

by a ring of boys,
each with a five-gallon bucket
as pediment,
pissing on the snowman's head.

In the science of imaginary solutions

I only make camp
with blind men

warming their hands
at an invisible fire.

Each of them has seen the seagull

loosed from his screech
coursing through a flurry
feeling nothing
of terrestrial borders
as land beneath him

becomes sand, and the sand
water, the water
deeper
as the tidal shelf falls away

and temperature

decreases, pressure

increases, light

dims as day

and night strike

a note of irrelevance, krill, bits

of microscopic decomposed organic
matter and irreducible

plastic polymers

drift down peaceably,

deep marine snow.

THIRST

Sarah Gambito

When God was a cup of coffee,
I lay my mouth down.
To begin the day ordinarily.
The girl inside the girl.
Grown all manly and lover-like.

I catch myself like a dove.
Just 15 minutes ago.

The whole kernel flies up and hits the sky with shout.
Myself broken apart in several rubies.

And I am afraid it can't happen again.
That even the book is too much.

One then two.
Two then one.

My father says Bibigay ang Diyos isang Peking Duck or two?
Is God going to give us one Peking Duck or two?

My lover has never had Peking duck.
He does not look disposed.

I like God alright but I don't understand anything he's talking about.
There he is blinking beside the Ferris wheel.

On the Ferris wheel, her God-book flew out of her lap
and she was relieved.

She screamed you bitch. Try to see where it lands.

Try to feel my thoughts for it.

ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT

Amy Sara Carroll

Middle ages handle love with the sing-song candor of kid gloves so the mind can pick up mo' mementos. A story sticks in the craw: an anthropologist fieldworking India found herself and her girlfriend caught in the act of making love. Expecting swift retaliation, they were shocked by the witness's interpretation—"two women minting money." Cultural counter-fits? Absolution-by-informant? Realism's vertigo? These days, I also tread uncharted waters. Coming of age lesbian, I mocked the monotony of the money shot. Now it's as if I wear a T-shirt with the logo HETERO silkscreened across my chest. Sometimes it serves me right—airport security feels a mite less frisky. But, at other times, the gilded cage of melancholy preordains my songbird's destiny. And, like the apple on William Tell's head, I am shot into a flowerbed, genealogy's perennial. This is the kiss of another spiderwoman's bliss: *be careful what you wish for. A penny for your thoughts. I know not what I've done.* Meanwhile, back at the split-level ranch, the gravity of the situation eludes elucidation. *You got peanut butter in my chocolate!* (Some Coke-laced-memento experiment, boy-meets-girl skin flick.) Like cutting teeth, it's a re-release, *Don't bite the breast that feeds you.*

DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME

EGYPTIAN SECRETS OR WHITE AND BLACK ART FOR MAN AND BEAST

Albertus Magnus

TO ASCERTAIN WHETHER A SICK PERSON WILL
BECOME WELL AGAIN.

Cut a piece of bread, rub the patient's teeth therewith, and throw it before a dog. If he eats it, the patient will recover. Otherwise, the disease is dangerous.

SECRET REMEDY OF THE GREAT THEOPHRASTUS
PARACELSUS FOR HEALING THE CANCER.

This celebrated recipe is composed as follows: When a human being takes hold with his right hand of a live mole, and keeps the mole so long with a tight grip until it dies, such a hand obtains by dint of this miraculous proceeding, such marvelous power, that cancer boils, repeatedly rubbed, by moving up and down with this hand will break open, cease to form again, and entirely vanish.

TO CURE FROSTED FEET.

Take a white woolen cloth which has never been used before, burn it to ashes, strew these ashes upon the afflicted feet, and they will heal.

FOR THE WORM ON ANY PART OF THE LIMB,
WHEREVER IT MAY BE.

Worm, I conjure thee, by the beams of sacred daylight; worm, I conjure thee, by the mystic shades of night; worm, I conjure thee by those five wounds; worm, I conjure thee by those holy three nails of Christ; worm, I conjure thee, by the power of God Almighty, if thou be green, blue, white, black, or red, that thou shalt now be lying in the finger stark and dead, and may this be counted as penance for thee. Three times to be recited, and every time the holiest name of the Lord is repeated, blow over the diseased limb.

TO KNOW WHEN CATTLE ARE PLAGUED BY WITCHES.

The hair stand on end, or bristles on the head, and they generally sweat by night or near dawn of day.

FOR HAUNTED HORSES OR CATTLE.

Take the left-hand glove of a woman afflicted with rheumatism in the right arm, steep it in fresh water, and allow the animals to drink thereof.

WHEN AN ANIMAL TREADS ON A NAIL, SPEAK THUS:

This is the nail which was used to nail Christ, the Lord; that it may not swell or fester, and no other injury may cause.

FOR SCABS.

At the burial of any person, proceed to a running stream, and draw water from it with your hands, and pour it over the head. While the water runs downward, draw the water also downward; and whenever the water is poured upon the head, do not cease to utter: Call, recede, and leave, like the dead in the grave.

TO MAKE ONE'S SELF INVISIBLE.

Yon must obtain the ear of a black cat, boil it in the milk of a black cow, then make a thumb cover of it and wear it on the thumb, and no one will be able to see you.

HOW TO BE ABLE TO SEE IN THE DARKEST NIGHT.

Grease the eyes with the blood of a bat.

ACCOUNT OF AN EXPERIENCED FORTUNE HUNTER, HOW TREASURES BENEATH THE EARTH RISE AND FALL.

If one is contemplating to dig up a treasure, he should above all other things know, whenever the treasure stands highest, to rise with the sun and return again with the sinking of the same. If the treasure happens to be hidden in an open field, the affair will soon be righted by digging around, crosswise, or undermining, so that the treasure can be reached from below, but one must not be tardy in constructing the posts or galleries in order to prop the treasure in time, because the digger might otherwise be buried underneath the falling heap. But, if it can be so conducted that

the sun can shine crosswise under the treasure, it may be raised, since the goblins of the earth have no longer the power to remove the same.

FOR HYSTERICs.

Take dried chicken manure, grind it to powder, and give a pinch of it to the patient in a prune. It is a quick remedy.

FOR EPILEPSY OR FITS.

Take some part of the hind leg of a calf, also part of a bone of a human body, from a graveyard; pulverize both, mix the mass well, and give the patient three points of a knife full. If a person is attacked by this disease, and falls upon the ground, you must let him lie and not touch him.

A SECRET AND CURIOUS PIECE OF MARVEL, TO DISCERN IN A MIRROR WHAT AN ENEMY DESIGNS AT THE DISTANCE OF THREE MILES OR MORE.

Obtain a good plain looking glass, as large as you please, and have it framed on three sides only; upon the left side it should be left open. Such a glass must be held toward the direction where the enemy is existing, and you will be able to discern all his markings, maneuverings, his doings and workings. Was effectually used during the Thirty Years' War.

TO DESTROY MICE.

In such food as they may like, mix mercury, or burnt lead, or particles of iron, produced by forging or black hellebore.

A SPECIFIC PIECE OF ART BY WHICH ALL DANGERS OF CONFLAGRATIONS ARE AVOIDED FROM A DWELLING HOUSE.

Take in the evening or in the morning a black hen from its nest, cut its throat, throw it upon the ground, cut the stomach of the hen from out of the body, but nothing else, and be careful to leave everything else inside. After this proceeding try to obtain a piece of gold quartz. The piece must be large as a saucer. These two articles wrap up together; take an egg laid on Green Thursday, wrap the three pieces thus obtained up in bees'-wax, and put all in an octagon pot of clay, cover the same tightly, and bury it under the house door sill. Such a house is protected from all dangers of fire, although the flames may surround it.

Selected and edited by Brett Fletcher Lauer.

THE CREATORS

Rowan Ricardo Phillips

They fitted me with a horse's head
but in the end
they didn't name me Roberta.

Better said: it's an equine skull, lipless
the teeth
shine like scalpels. Lipless am I vague?

Under the bright worklights
of surgeon Dick
and mystic George they lowered my soul slowly

into what we'll now call "Me." The exposed tendons
in the flayed-open husk
spasmed as though squid.

The ruined blood-soaked assistant cried out
and was fired
right on the spot.

"We've successfully inserted your soul into
America," they said through
glass.

I staggered up
to see myself
but all I saw was xbox.

All dazzled clone
and glands of mal,
things ran through me like piss;

a hero chip
to translate death
into a hero's bliss.

And all the paperwork filed,
they gave me a new helmet.
All the paperwork filed,

they fitted me with cables.
All the paperwork filed
they sent me foreign into foreign.

All the paperwork filed,
they tried to hide the Horror.
"Honor, Honor, Honor, Honor,"

and then they said, "Do good."

LETTERS

Rebecca Gopoian

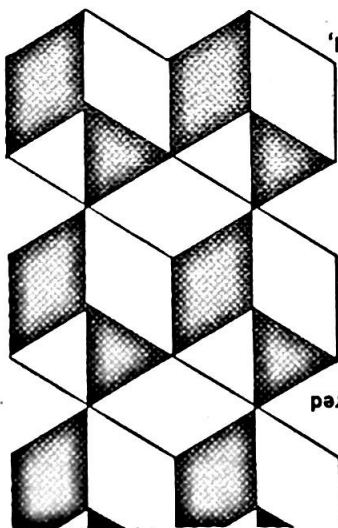
In another place altogether, I was teaching, or passing out Christmas presents. The gifts were letters of the alphabet. I could tell that everyone loved them by the way they grabbed them and held on. Each letter was engaged in an act of grace, something astonishing. Oh, now I remember. They were changing into animals.

"We want words over here."—Major New York book editor rejecting illustrated manuscript of w.k. authors.



"In many ways, we need a general reorientation. We are all hip to civil and political rights. If there were air pollution that affected only Negroes, there'd be action today. But everyone is beset by constant insults to the body. Air pollution, chemical poisoning of vegetables and of water systems—all of these bring about suffering and death on a greater scale than political injustice. The thing to make people understand and take action on is that the enemy is not 'air pollution' or 'traffic

**ARE EXTINCT. REAL WE
NEXT 30 YEARS WILL B**



A two-mile-high tetrahedral city will consist of an open truss framework "structural mountain" whose sides are covered with parked mobile homes. At night, the city will be ablaze with lights, as are petroleum refineries now.

City domes will be so high and their structural members so delicate that they will appear to be invisible. The domes operate as a controlled cloud, bringing shadow when shadow is desirable, bringing sun when sun is desirable. They will keep out rain, snow, storms, and exterior industrial fumes. They will collect rain water. The temperature in the city will be stabilized, there will be a semi-tropical atmosphere. People will live in gardens, or upon garden-terrace skyscrapers, needing only local screening for privacy.

"I don't know what we're doing at all, I just write them."

—John Lennon, asked for comment on his songs.



accidents.' These are impersonal results. The enemy is flesh and blood human beings hiding behind the corporate veil of bigness and anonymity. The activities of these corporations must be brought within the embrace of the rule of law. In a complex, industrial, interdependent society, we cannot allow this continuing callousness and unconcern for human welfare, all in the name of Profit." —Ralph Nader.

ALTH -- INDESTRUCTIB HEND THAT CHANGES IN



"How can any educational institution compete with the force of television on the mind of a child? Television teaches the child to relax minor tensions with a pill; to take off weight with a pill; to win status and sophistication with a cigarette; to wake up, slow down, be happy, relieve tension with pills — that is, with drugs." — New York City Mayor John V. Lindsay.

Because society does not understand how its industrial wealth developed, it maintains a parochial, agricultural outlook.

"A slave is an *animal* which is owned. A single slave can best be compared to a domesticated dog....The desire to turn men into animals was the principal motive for the development of slavery....Once men had succeeded in collecting large numbers of slaves, as they collected animals in their herds, the foundations for the tyranny of the state were laid."—*Elias Canetti, CROWDS AND POWER.*

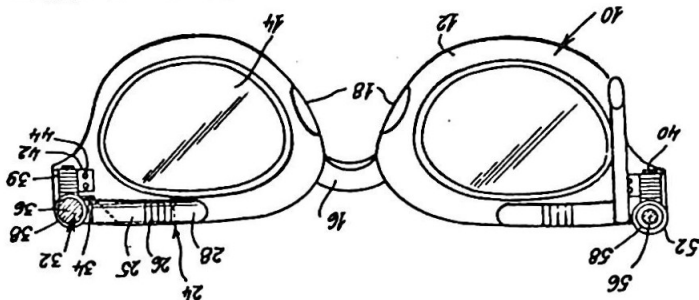
DYMAXION:

Maximum gain of advantage from the minimum energy input.

The more people studying and experimenting, the more discoveries and inventions result, the higher the standards of living.

LD SOCIETY TO COMPARE
LE, WITHOUT PRACTICAL

Section of drawings for patent 3,410,638 granted to James Robert Longworthy, of Clinton, N. J., for cycloscopes providing the wearer with a rear view. Wearer must glance up at an angle of 35 degrees to see image, which passes around a 90 degree angle where the frame is joined in front and is then reflected in a prism. Inventor believes glasses will serve as an early-warning device to fight crime in the streets.



Nov. 12, 1968
J. R. LANGWORTHY
3,410,638
SPECTACLE FRAME WITH REAR VIEW TELESCOPES AND TEMPLE
MOUNTED OPTICAL FIBER RODS
2 Sheets-Sheet 1
Filed Dec. 9, 1965



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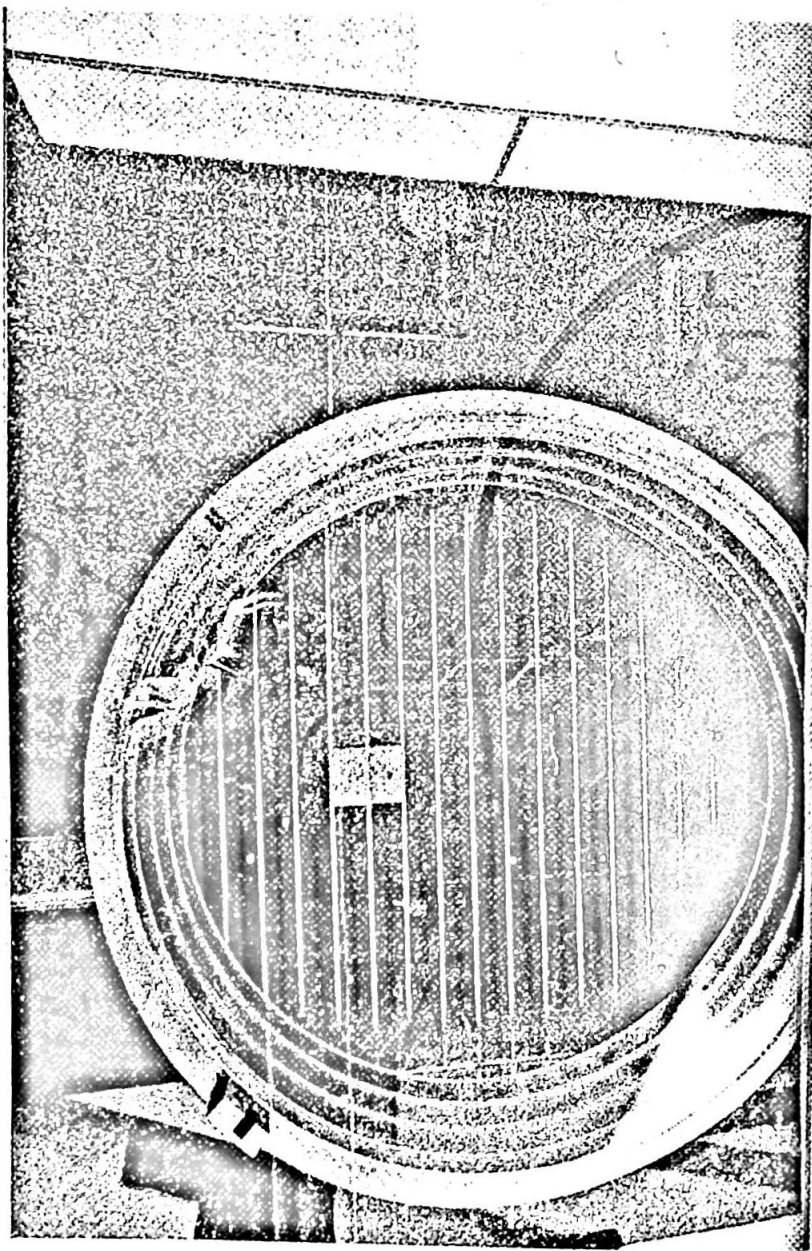
Tetrahedral cities will grow symmetrically. They will never change their shape as populations grow from thousands to millions. Each family will always have 200 square feet of floor space.

Tetrahedral cities floating on the ocean will use atomic reactors for energy and desalination. Major ships already desalinate their water.

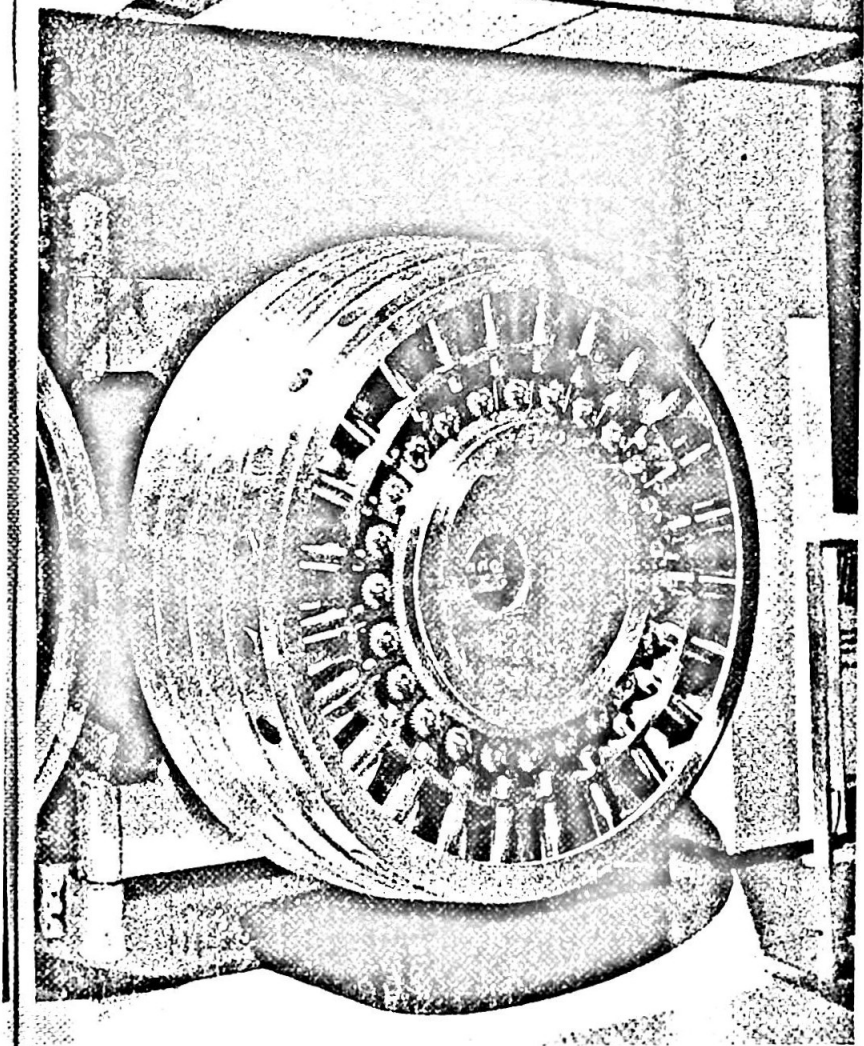
Tetrahedral

When you put three triangles with common sides around a point, a fourth triangle is formed at the base: A tetrahedron.

"Now, John, you know perfectly well that I've never enjoyed having a good time."—John Cage's mother.



Dust artist with vaulting ambition
thoughtfully offered on bank window a combination
to stored millions. (Everything was safe,
for nothing was revealed.)



Higher standards of living guarantee that the population will never explode.

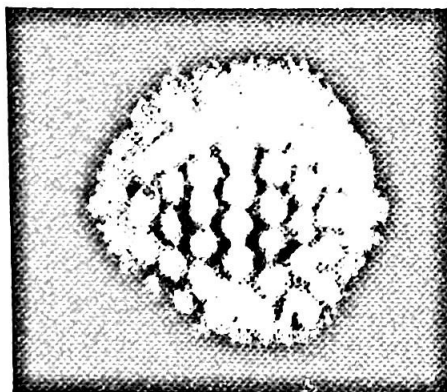
Disposable handcuffs have been tested by Cleveland police. Made of nylon straps, the cuffs are locked by a steel spring and must be cut off the suspect's wrists. At 50 cents a pair, they are considered too expensive for everyday police use—"but they're ideal for mass arrests of demonstrators," a Cleveland official said.

Everything you've learned in school as "obvious" becomes less and less obvious as you begin to study the universe. For example, there are no solids in the universe. There's not even a suggestion of a solid. There are no absolute continuums. There are no surfaces. There are no straight lines. Why did the chicken cross the road?

"Today is the first day of the rest of your life."
—Abbie Hoffman.

ATION OF PHYSICAL EN , IT IS APPROXIMATEL

"Facial expressions are often more reliable guides to a man's intentions than speech. Our looks give us away."
—Dr. Nikolaas Tinbergen, professor of animal behavior, Oxford University.



The mathematical formula for the design of the geodesic dome applies perfectly to the structure of the protein shell that surrounds every known virus. The common cold virus is the shape of an icosahedron—a solid with 20 triangular faces and 12 corners.

Five-year-old boy: "What is the temperature?"
Father: "58 degrees."
Son: "Is that cold?"



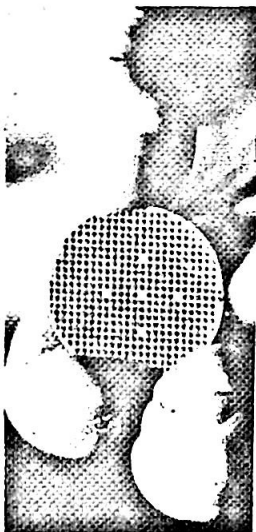
The more industrial a nation becomes, the more rapidly its birth rate decreases.

In 17th-century America, the average family had 13 children. With the installation of waterworks and sewer systems, the average family had fewer children. In fully industrialized America, the average family has 1.9 children.

ERG Y AND HUMAN INTEL ATIONS ARE INVISIBLE

Ceramic mosaic
containing 8000 separate
silicon "tiles" arranged
to form 440 integrated
circuits.

Doming of
established cities
in the moderate
climates will
probably not
occur until domed
cities in virgin
lands have proved
successful—
or when
environmental
emergencies
and other
make immediate
doming imperative.



All the people in
the world today
could be housed
in the buildings of
Manhattan—with
each person
having as much
floor room as at a
cocktail party.
All the cities of the
world occupy
less than one per
cent of the
Earth's surface.



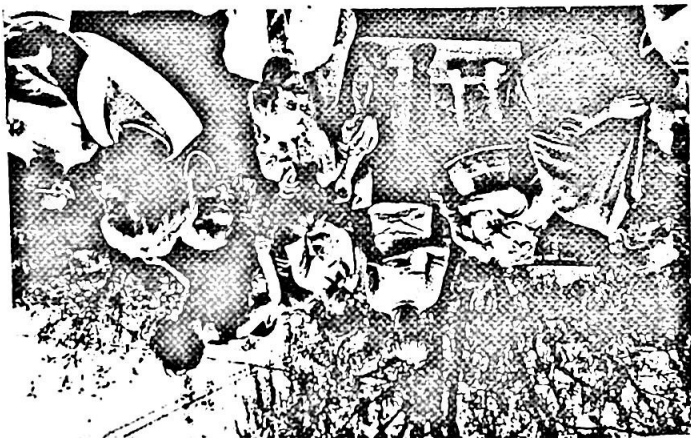
Invention often occurs when individuals, frustrated by circumstances, try to transform the environment rather than to reform human nature.



"It's like free play, or study hall, to make an audience comparison. You learn a lot from it."—Al Kooper, the organist, on rock jam sessions.

LECT. EVERY TIME WE OLUTIONARY TRANSFORM

Ships are total environments, unlike buildings. The Queen Mary was a beautiful environment, benefiting from design principles that could be adapted for city use. Getting there may be all the fun.

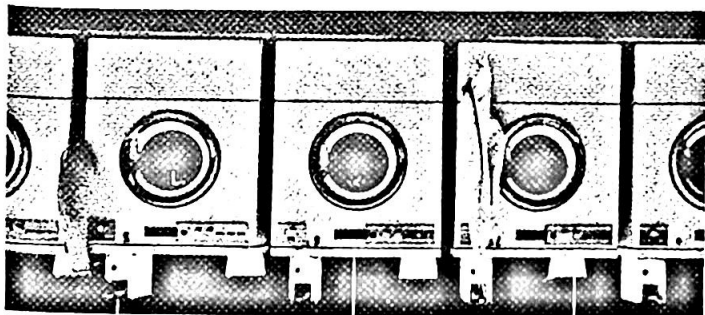




"One of our professors discussed a lot about whether our ultimate responsibility is just to make money, or to promote change. I'm not against money, but I certainly have no investment in the status quo."

AL. BECAUSE PRIME EV I TI HTLWEA REAL ESU

Until New York was built, all the great cities were products of Newtonian "no change" norms. Their romance lay in their pre-occupation with man's historical, bastioned past. What makes New York City the "most important something" in all history is that it was the first great Einsteinian reality. Its romance is its living manifestation of history continually in the making. It is the center of world-wide communications networks. Its population is transient; the average residence is three years.



Mariners lived in a state of continuous discovery. They had to develop mathematics to survive.

Limited by the laws of floatability, they designed lightweight vessels that gave them technical superiority.

The closer man lives to the unknown, the more inventive he becomes—the quicker he adopts new ways.

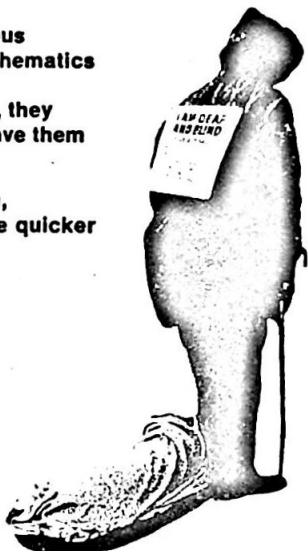
It may be that all that is chaotic is in man's illiterate and bewildered imagination and fearful ignorance.

OSLO KEY BASES TAKEN,
BIG SEA AIR BATTLES ON.

World Telegram 7th Sports.

The corporate cranium—
"journalism"—

Industrialization's limited-
liability vocalizer.



WHERE CHANGE IS NORM
INTELLIGENCE INCREASES.





Most of the major advances in science and technology have been in the invisible realm—synergy—the behavior of whole systems in ways unpredictable by the individual behavior of their sub-systems.



A British firm offered a nine-ounce gold chamber pot at \$66 an ounce. As an "industrial product," it doesn't violate British laws against gold hoarding.

RE LIVING IN A WORLD MUST INCREASE WEALTH

World housing is an educational problem. Men need time to learn what they really want and how to effect it. It must not always be a matter only of the house "back" builders. *What is demanded is a change in our imaginative picture of the world.*—BERNARD KESSLER

Many people believe that housing can be accompanied only by a political mandate. They overlook the far vaster, prodigalness of the inventor.



126A

Americans fear automation. Many are afraid that automation will mean full-scale unemployment and little or no individual purchasing power.

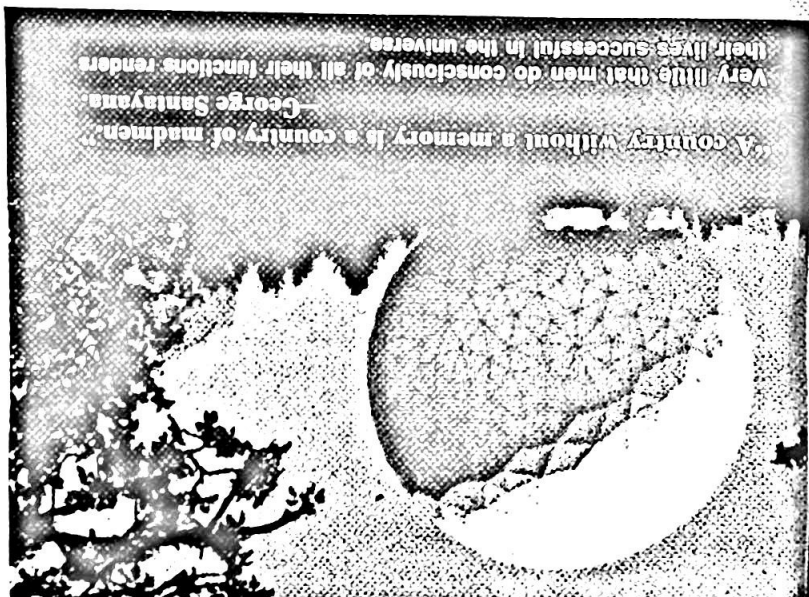
A study of the applications of automation reveals it can vastly increase goods and services—such prodigious wealth, in fact, that “the rank and file” will demand automation.

Most people will be able to “do their own thing” all the time on highly paid “research” fellowships. They no longer will need to prove “a right to live.”

! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! !

Teleportation: Within a century, a man's entire genetic code may be fed to a computer, flashed to a receiving computer on the moon or a planet, and instantly reconstructed into the person who stood on the Earth a few seconds earlier. Two yours. (Or, OR, have WE been teleported?)

TO ELIMINATE POVERTY SICAL UNIVERSE. WE A



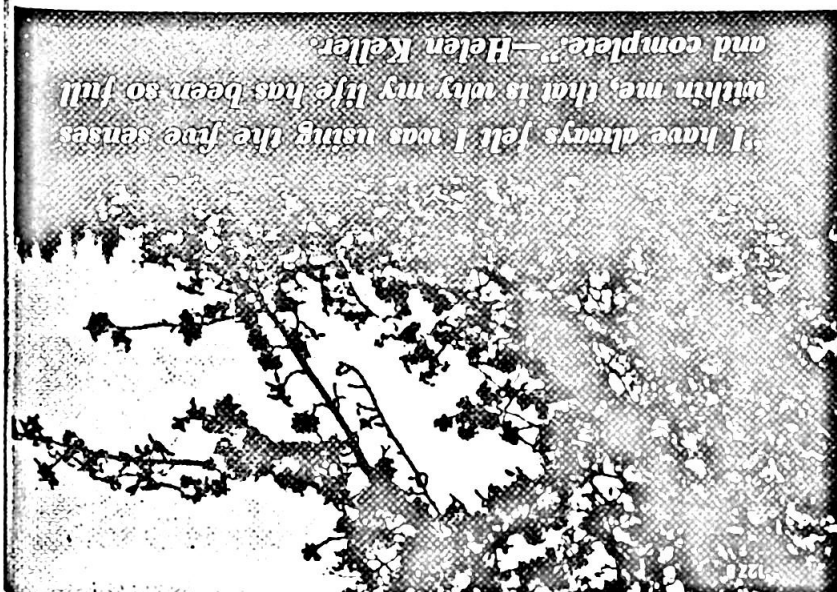
A country without a memory is a country of madmen.
—George Santayana
Very little that men do consciously of all their functions renders their lives successful in the universe.



In the "new world," you will not be concerned with "someone is trying to get my job." All of the fundamental bases of man's corruption will be gone.

Two prodigious, making-the-world-work breakthroughs in late 1969! Weeds and leaves can now be converted into a protein food that has the same consistency as cheese. Animal blood can now be converted into a substance that tastes a little like powdered milk and is 50 per cent protein. (More than 2,000,000,000 pounds of animal blood are thrown away every year in the U. S. alone.)

INVISIBLE AREA OF PHY IN SCIENCE, DESIGN



"I have always felt I was using the five senses within me, that is why my life has been so full and complete."—Helen Keller

“Let’s pretend there’s a way of getting through into it, somehow, Kitty. Let’s pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that we can get through. Why, it’s turning into a sort of mist now, I declare! It’ll be easy enough to get through . . .” — “Through the Looking Glass.”

“aaaaaaa
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uuuuuuWw

**... , , , , , ! , ,
... , , , , , - - -**

ENTROPY

Kyle G. Dargan

for Theresa

What if our alphabet was full
of atoms :: I would speak in moles—
spill more in my sleep than a drunk
criers convention :: Hear Ye,
I could not be silent :: Silence
translates into everything and nothing
like the atom in fission
labs where atomic models brace
on wooden bones :: What if
atoms left fossils—they would be
an ornate script, illegible
across all our faces—

STAR-SPANGLED SUTRA

If the weapon be a mask, sand down the dorsal self
so the mask clings to nothing but the mask.



If the weapon be holy, keep it oiled with doubt—
the chamber, the forte, the bow's dark joy.



If the weapon be human, draw ligaments snug
over hollow joints—motion insulated, pooling
like venom in limbs.



If the weapon be utterance, fix its warhead
against a knot of air just atop the throat's plummet.



If the weapon be flame, first douse yourself
with remorse. Distinguish your enemies, ignite them.

PRETRIAL CONFERENCE IN CHAMBERS

Ed Pavlić

he promised us a price & well-peeled
face ivory man & nothing else
no dynamite buried in a troubadour
quicklime on plaster & a regular Rialto
in the mouth lined with hum-gum &
saltpeter play the tape : "c'est toi qui sait c'est
toi qui sait" stop we have photos by day
he acts like horses grow reins in the womb by
night clear polish on banjo picks
& smokes the thick black eyes of stallions

no jury would dare too worried
about crepe stolen for safety-skulls
& rain etched spindles of salt
& wind in the brain thoughts huddle
in silent chants of EZ Pass & "free parking
forever" experts stayed behind we
clocked the pulse of footprints fossilized
in broken glass we gave chase but didn't know
whether to taste the toll or pay off the tongue

frozen at half-mast to the pole by the time
squads arrived deep enough in the
borough we have photos character
& caterpillar predation your honor
you could have fit the remains all what

was left of him in a full box
of wooden matches lightening stills don't show
the strobe-blind sprint thru the olive

grove you'd need both solo-sound of the bright

flint cat-catch of the black spark

from ABOVE THE LEADERS

Alice Notley

In the Judas galaxy or universe a metaphysical treason had been fitted
against us.

Whoever made the universe is a shit; gets you nowhere. Unless we
hung lights against a black velvet routine creating these shores
and maybe we did—the whole ravaging, gorgeous Flop.

No harbor. Her readings are reissued in a great-poets hands-off edition,
unbought

Living on guilt welfare in the Hotel Precipice, gay negligee and thievery
—It feels like I must be a Thief. A Con. Bareass in the storm
while the solemn Jobholders are welcomed with glittering confetti through
the portals of the City.

If I'd known I

was supposed to be that
hokey bourgeois and material ambition
I would've never been born, O nail-polished cosmos, would have never left
home.
Walk on into the mayor's office and give him a blow job in his dressing
gown.

The cool of the matter is this journalistic outpost, United Galaxies,
a lonely and dangerous
vigil for the only democratic mind in town.

I encourage you to be photographed in your best most deciphered heritage
Before the Blood Tide Comes in, unhallucinated.
Breathless, you will know what you knew. For an instant.
Someone else will get the Afterlife; someone else always gets everything.

I saw the sick man again, tall and unsteady
he got on at Bolivar, exited at Buttes-Chaumont: a white man
gray-haired, thin, with small cheekbones. A week ago a black woman
dressed in beige and dyed blonde hair, thick beige powder on her face,
beige stockings and shoes, got on at Gare de l'Est and descended with me
at Louis Blanc talking to air. But I want to
stare at these people, fearing any connection I might establish:
she a little crazy seemed to want to follow me. Because I was warm
and intense? knocking on her mind's door, out of curiosity
Or she may have been a transvestite. Sunday morning at 8.
The plump young boy helps the old man, who is
nonetheless a tourist with a backpack, find his way through
the Gare de l'Est which being remodeled lacks signs
All the chestnuts in bloom in the Buttes. The yellow tulips
weren't there anymore, inward with their red stripes.
The owner of the boulangerie dislikes my wrinkled
five-euro note: I say, It's not very elegant ... so she laughs
and accepts it. No politicians know what we say.
On the rue de Rivoli, Friday, it was muggy with bursts of grey
in different gusty intensities, some verging on purple.
Recently I dreamed of the arcaded passages as a tunnel
with uncanny lights. If you touch our bruised selves
it's sky on earth; such treasure, wouldn't you join me?
But I'm so afraid of you. She was young, with her friend, and suitcases
the cuffs of her long pants ragged, she'd stepped all over them—is it a
fashion?

Fortuna the wheel where you spend the night, to capitalize
on your experience
which you take into a pet shop to be disgraced.
Dogs are like water or minnows,
when they run metallic and black, so that you don't
yet know what part of midnight you've stopped at
Cherries in the firmament or three gold coffins lined up.
Come here and stand for a moment; it isn't a real pause
Every protrusion or dent in time has its own
consequences doesn't it
Here are some table scraps; you can't just have a salary for
accepting the collective memory.
A woman is being drained of her shadow. The wheel diamonds
abscond with the beginning of life. I want to feel Disgust
It appears to be formal, you built it with tungsten.
I was judged on my merits by everyone, especially
the paranoid witch, Calumny.
And her lieutenant, Scenarios, as they develop projects
in book discussion groups lending them confidence in the warm
circling chairs.

THE OFFERING

Mara Jebsen

sugar sugar sugar sugar
they have got me again, those badbutt cupids
love me, loft me, lift me soft
up-raising, appraisal, examine
my left calf, small perfect
animal for gift, slaughter
have it. and thigh and knobbly
knee-bone, too. i'll throw in
more, ankle and rump
like any grinning charmed
fat-belly butcher, wiping hands
on the apron, on the last day,
on christmas, saying, hell
it'll spoil anyway, take it, take it
all,
Free Free Free!

REV LIKING TO EAT THINGS OF BEAUTY

Brenda Iijima

Hmmmm, this liking to eat things of beauty
What is beauty Likening What is freedom Pray tell
Criminals know what they want
The Law knows what it wants
Are you allergic to antelope
Were you acquitted
What was acquired (through burial)
She inquired of the enemy combatants
The orange jumpsuit is very becoming
We are all becoming
Enemy combatants.
Your life threatens my life
Exponentially
Excessive sugar production
There's one lung and for a time
It is breathing
Impossible to be nude with the body excreting
For added sensuality mists of formal-
Dehyde For real, perfuming
We couldn't smell good with the reality of land mines
Step this way for a lesson in grace
Cows display grace if you consider their philosophy
Banding about by some nebulous ideal the people
The people crank the heat
In a former life I was a cow

And I ate you
Then cows were vegetarians
And human flesh was considered fruit
So be it

RAW AMONG RELICS FOUND THERE

What grew formerly under the barnyard
You laid your tools down pitchfork ax Grass
Is greener where the bulls graze A nuclear
Arsenal stored (euphemistically) in the underground
Of that hill Hell, I'll have a beer hollers the man
On tv Someone takes offense at the naturalness of
Shitting And like an elaborate harness ornament
Coyote O how the U.S. government tries to
Exterminate you Medicines in a wishing well
Remember good ol' England?
Writing between episodes of *Law & Order*
The arsenal has fortified walls at least 6 feet thick
Fault lines nowhere to be seen seismically
Among the relics in bone
A perfect needle was found
The bronze objects included two perfect finger rings
A portion of fibula
A penannular ring brooch
A needle and several rivet heads
Digging up ancestral remains means we live in the future
It means the past is actually the present and we are
Living our ancestors
A bronze link of unusual form Loom weights
And sling-bullets
I desperately
Want to see your habitat
Be the habitat

"THE WORLD REFLECTED IN
THE PLACE YOU ARE"

Kate Greenstreet

Just that fast, the light had shifted.
He began to speak. Think about how you want to live.

Basically, I'm talking about all those pictures.

Every wheel,
every mill.

Describes a different kind of work.

Ten thousand died, six thousand came to listen.
They're interested in violence. Imagine how much

you'd want to hear something else.

MUSIC IS FEELING, THEN, NOT SOUND

Elisa Gabbert & Kathleen Rooney

When the end of a song “fades to black,” it goes on that way forever, you just can’t hear it. Which is kind of like dying in your sleep, vs. flying off a cliff and exploding.

I am expected to say something, but have nothing to say. I could try fill lyrics—“doo n’ doo n’ doo doo” and “hey hey, my my”—but that would probably be wrong; what works in song rarely works in life.

The right song at the wrong time, or the wrong song at the right time? I’m drunk, I know it by heart, and my misery spirits me up like a bag in a gust.

In this state of mind, I can’t decide: Am I more angry w/ myself when I find angry music funny, or more angry w/ music when I find it sounds like a beer commercial.

The trick to classical music is to imagine it’s the extrinsic soundtrack to your day. You can’t hear it, but the audience can.

Waltz time corresponds to the rhythm of sweeping the cellar. The minuet is getting your picture taken w/ someone famous. The gavotte corresponds to laughing too hard and falling off the balcony.

Music always fails in execution—better to read sheet music. When subjects “listened” to Mozart’s Requiem on paper during a brain scan their auditory cortex caught fire.

The symphony was so engaging because the conductor's handwritten note at the top of the second movement read *Live bunnies! Running loose!*

What if I'm never walking through the woods alone and hear an incomprehensibly exquisite music?

If I have to go, I want music to murder me like a death star galaxy: in a deadly jet of radiation and heat.

In come the violins—giant crickets using their back legs like kindling.

THE MALADY THAT TOOK THE PLACE OF THINKING

Timothy Donnelly

When I close my eyes its voice insists we're close
to solving once and for all and with panache
those mysteries to which we've been applying

ourselves so much these days, almost to the exclusion
of all that I had taken to be the case, factwise.
There had seemed to be only one world to adhere to

but now I can see how there really isn't any, just roads
with signs directing further, toward and away
from the same humiliating noplacé you already are.

These mysteries will be solved not one at a time
but in a slow, general unfolding along the lines
of the magnolia, and trying to rush one solution by prying it

open will compromise not only this solution but many
if not all the others. I'm not that person anymore
with his hands immediately all over the magnolia.

I'm not that other one either, stomping off sorry
he doesn't understand. If it looks like I'm thinking, I'm not,
I'm waiting, and I can wait forever to find out why.

If it looked like I was sorry to look at that photograph
of women and children shot down by an American
battalion on a bright clear day in March, look again:

with no world to adhere to, there can be no photograph,
no women, no children, and certainly no battalion
shooting when there was nothing there to begin with.

TEAM OF FAKE DEITIES ARRANGED ON AN ORANGE PLATE

Maybe indolence is a form of conflict between oneself
and everything else in the room, and turning
inward and away is a step toward peace, or into it.

Or maybe peace would be more like turning
toward with hands outstretched, an open look
through measured breathing. Either way, I like it.

I know I do. I like the way it sounds when I sing.
I like to see amber light from the pages
of the book I'm not reading. I like the clock's unstoppable

escapement and the cornstalks wrung with blue
convolvulus, a treacherous vine whose flowers
look like drunken trumpets. Look at that look on the face

of the hardworking workman home again from work.
He's earned it. Look at that Indian elephant
decimating peppermints. I like it. I like what I see

and I am not indolent. I like a nonexistent Deity
and a team of fake deities arranged on an orange plate.
I like what I've done though I know it won't last.

And even if there is a Deity, I still like the idea
of a team of little fakes, and if we turn their invention
into a contest, you can bet your ass I'm winning.

LET'S TALK

Linh Dinh

The shit knowledge gets stuck
In between the eloquent teeth,
Anchors those haloed thoughts.

My chain of minty abstractions trip
Over the titty bumps, get hovered
Into the scalloped ever pink. Your
Jazzy jibes sidestep that rude rod.

Each utters in euphemisms, the hate
And fuck fuck creases ironed away.

MOUNTED

I love this head, I really do, it brings back
A lot of tingling, audible memories. I hate
That one, front and back. Sure, I'd love
To shoulder mount this still-wet one,
But it will cost me 700 bucks. Shoot!

A cheapo alternative is to let, say, a million
Bugs clean out all the facial hair and flesh
Of a cherished, targeted head. Simultaneously
Eating and crapping, these dermestid beetles
Will devour anything, wood, drywall,
Linoleum, silicone, animal or human tissues,
Even the hideous memories associated with
A smirking, accusatory, just-murdered head.

Stunted by the Black Death, the cathedral
In Siena is still the mother of all cathedrals,
Its upper nave ringed by the white marble
Heads of maybe a hundred popes, glaring down
At the squinting, open-mouthed, tiny and yet-
To-be eaten heads, with their cheapo cameras.

Bud lived life quietly and solidly. He enjoyed
The simple and beautiful pleasures of each day.
He accepted life's occasional cruelties gracefully.
Asked after dinner if there was anything he needed,
His reply was always, "No, I have everything I need."

Charlie B's in Missoula is also a sort of cathedral,
With its own gallery of heads, mostly of white men.

Mounted in black and white by Lee Nye, they appear
In a hopped-up glow, wall-eyed and beer-battered,
In a Stetson, fedora or baseball cap, often laughing,
Relieved and a little proud, perhaps, to have made it
Into middle age without leaving a chunk of themselves
A dozen time zones away, or just around the corner.

Gary went on to serve four years in the navy,
Which took him to Sassabo, Japan, where he
Developed a lifelong love of Oriental food.

WHAT'S DONE:

Daniel Khalastchi

Three girls in a brothel
take me back to their mistress
and wait. When she asks
what's wrong, I look down
at the floor. One of the girls
I've been told to call China says
I should be refunded. The
mistress slides off her reading
glasses and says someone needs
to tell her what the fuck is going
on. China nudges Lacy. Lacy
gets sick. We all move away
from the puddle she's made and the
third girl, Crystal, says it wasn't their
fault. The mistress is getting fed
up with the stalling and screams
loud while tying her robe. The three
women left are raising and raising and
raising their sound when I put out my hand
and everyone stops. In the skin
of my forearm, small fists push
up at odd intervals. If I turn
my wrists, whole bodies of
babies can be seen in profile. Under
the veins they move and sag and when
they touch, they appear to multiply.
China tells me to take off my shirt
and I do it. She tells me to take off

my pants and my shoes but my socks
should stay on until the mistress is
ready. I stand there naked for some
time; my penis erect from the heat
and perfume; my arms, heavy from
the weight of their keep. Crystal brings
me a chair and the mistress asks for a
brandy. When it arrives, she nods and I
make to take off one sock at a time. I pull
the left one down just past the heel and the mistress
hands me my money. Gray tails have pushed
through my Achilles tendon, thrashing
wildly for sense of location. To calm
them down, I feed ice and cheese crackers to the space be-
tween my toes. Walking is difficult. On my stomach,
I crawl to my clothes and get dressed. The
mistress, my sweet, sends word for a taxi.

HOAX COACH

Dean Young

The people that go by, you believe them?
Surely some must be fake
as much as the snow we see
especially indoors
where they like to ask you of yourself
provided you don't answer
or answer in a way that doesn't tilt the gravy
or tinge the cornices with worse bunting.
I read your e-mails, was I supposed to?
They'd been inadequately deleted
and you seemed upset about the parking structure's
new restrictions everyone knew were coming
like the big one that promises to dump
California into the blue yonder.
But count me in, at least on the outside.
Ignorance is no excuse for the law
that makes it impossible for you
to walk down the hall and though the wall
to tell all you've held inside so long
as the midday sky holds its stars in abeyance
and the stars, those wastrels, could care less.
Oh, you're not on fire,
that's just your ring-tome.

TWO MONTHS FROM TWO DAYS AGO

Waiting is the moon, waiting the bride
in the little girl. The red minute
waits in the white afternoon, the dream
in daylight consciousness. The prisoner

waits in his cell repeating "innocent"
in his head while the jurors wait
for their verdict to appear and make sense
although in most cases the opposite is true,

wait long enough everything disappears,
rivers, trees, all manner of species, you,
me. Is god what's waiting to hear back,
we the message sent out into the void?

Preparatory nubs on the weeping pussy willow,
pregnant woman in the airport taxi queue
reading a book of names. Alphabet waiting
to be rearranged into the letters of your name

just as you rearranged me so I thought
the furniture should be on the roof, winter
already spring, bells to drink wine from.
I couldn't wait to see you again

so I tried to warp space-time
with sexual energy alone, what a joke
especially over the telephone, sorry.
Slower the shorter days go,

the pool closed a month ago, goldfinches
gone from the cone flowers, cone flowers
brown bent low, hardly any need to mow,
it's cold, just a few crab apples on the bare tree

that might over-winter and ferment so
returning cedar waxwings can get drunk
enough to almost touch as I am almost
touching you wanting not to wait.

CRASH

Tracy Zeman

The frost, a million small catastrophes
on his November shirt,

he opens his eyes, lit blue crescents behind the glass.
No ice, no slick

pavement—raised sand, a ballooned fall
giving away its best shade, its see-through

survival. Snapping branches under his body
spotting the ground,

little monument apple-sweet red-right.

WHALE SOUND WEDGED

Emily Kendal Frey & Zachary Schomburg

it's not nothing
in your throat

these waves
must be code

for underwater
misunderstandings

thankfully, your mom
secured the cake

with your favorite
mammal on top

let's eat it
and blink

in our
blue-lit grave

LITTLE HANDLE

There is this little handle
somewhere on your body

I can have a little grip
my little suitcase

my hummingbird handle
ribs of what I know

JACK SPICER MAGIC WORKSHOP

QUESTIONNAIRE

Christian Hawkey

I.

With the gums gone the alveolar portions of the jaw
are easily jammed with gulfweed. And though the nose is basically
nothing,
the eye observes how it locates a loosening chimichanga in the armoire.

And now the depression-era iron lung
Of the radiator flung from the 73rd floor
is in my chest, the even row of it
fit to raise
even the evening-calm eyebrows of newly pruned children.

You will count your blue tooth among their holdings and
You will stay in the midst of them,
You will know their touch-free logic, you will hear them
in the narrow future when their cell phones ring among the trees.

II.

In a prerecorded endlessness
Snow, clips of salt
He lost his marbled godwit.

The color white. He walks
Over a star-spangled carpet made
Illiterate by lighttight clouds.

Without eyes or thumbs
He suffers
But the hooded chinophiles quiver

In the hoary endlessness
How clearly ladled a wound
His breath tilts left.

Snow, a new salt flat
In the freaking endlessness.

III.

Blue-rooted heron, as if a thought grew backwards out of the sky a lake
Holds, its taut chunk of grey song, like me no traveler
Taking everything in without rest, loose-winged water-bird
And dumb with music and patience and both.

I stand on the waterfront, like him no traveler
Without borders, dangling between a sentence with two wings.
I have the most beautiful indigestion and take my rest.

They will not hunt us because we ape their dress.
The flesh of the flesh is this and is dumb.
The sound of an arrow, the sight of a hunter
Each threads the hole in the idea of a life without wings.

So let us die for death alone is motion
And death alone will make these herons fly.
A wingless departure feathers the ocean.
Another way of saying this is how you die.

JACK SPICER MAGIC WORKSHOP

QUESTIONNAIRE

Lisa Jarnot

I.

With the gums gone marching
are they gone. And though the nose is next to nothing,
the eye is marching gone.

And now the downside
Of the radiator on the downside of the floor
is it, the even row of it
fit to raise
a din of children.

You will count the teeth of mongoose
You will stay in the midst of them,
You will know the mongoose, you will hear them
in the narrow mongoose dawn.

II.

In the snow endlessness
Snow, and sea salt
He lost his sounding snow.

The color white. He walks
Over an antelope skin carpet made
of snow.

Without eyes or thumbs.
He suffers all the snow
But the snowflakes quiver

In the snow and in the endlessness
How is it that a wound
His snow is left.

Snow, and sea salt and snow
In the snow-blown endlessness.

III.

Blue-rooted heron, spring lake
frog song, like me no traveler
Taking buoyed rest, loose-winged water-bird
And dumb with music cheeping.

I stand upon the waterfront, like him no traveler
traveling, dangling on traveled wings.
I caw and take my rest.

They will not hunt us for
The flesh of the hunter is hunted and is dumb.
The sound of an arrow, the sight of a hunter
is hunting a life without wings.

So let us die for death alone is motion
And death alone will make these herons fly.
Dead wingless flycatching ocean
hybridized to die.

JACK SPICER MAGIC WORKSHOP

QUESTIONNAIRE

Matthew Rohrer

I.

With the gums gone the maxillofacial features
are entirely Sapphic. And though the nose is afraid of nothing,
the eye betrays itself with a twitch.

And now the miraculously contained violence
Of the radiator threatens the dream, the floor
is cowardly planks, the even row of it
fit to raise
square and fearful children.

You will counter their arguments with a hail of gunfire.
You will stay in the midst of them,
You will knowingly join their church with bad intentions, you will hear
them
in the narrow passage between your heart and your mouth.

II.

Interior endlessness
Snow, snow on basalt
He lost his desire to masturbate & that was his last chance.

The color white. He walks
Over an otherworldly carpet made
of the sputum of angels.

Without eyes or thumbs
He suffers, dies & is buried in the snow.
But the white panties in his memory still quiver

In the heavenly endlessness
How the hosts of Paradisia wound
His watch then quietly left.

Snow, rain, a salty mist
In the holy endlessness.

III.

Blue-rooted heron, you remind me of Blake
and his innocent song, like me no traveler
Taking indolent rest, loose-winged water bird
And dumb with musical heart palpitations.
I stand upon the waterfront, like him no traveler
is completely at rest, dangling ontologically while the evening swings.
I get ripped and take my rest.

They will not hunt us if we lie perfectly still.
The flesh of the listless is unsavory and is dumb.
The sound of an arrow, the sight of a hunter
—just disguise yourself for a life without wings.

So let us die for death alone is motion
And death alone will make these herons fly.
Fly wingless to a dead resort by the ocean.
Capitalism made it die.

DEAR MELANCHOLY,

Susan Meyers

Let me start again,
dear gall midge, dear black bile.
At dawn you entered my dream
and I thought the bridge I was crossing
would break in two.
I thought the water below
would drink me before I woke
and heard the mourning dove
but only faintly.
I lay there, alone,
until I felt you beside me.
If you were my lover, I'd say
you're faithful. You are not my lover.
I must tend the bait bucket.
The crickets, having sucked
the potato dry, are climbing
the screen wall. A few are dying.
Small news, I know,
and not the sort you wanted to hear.

DEAR HEAVY HEART,

Though you are weighted
with lead, sunk this night

to the cold lake bottom
among a season of skipped stones,

worn and fisted with the old
perplexity of grief,

tomorrow's net, having poked
and fished around

for nothing but oddities
will lift you through air, dripping,

to be eyed and chucked—cheerful—
back to the hot, brambled bank.

NINETY-NINE ESCAPING NORTH DAKOTA

L. S. Klatt

When day fails, search by flashlight:
don't let the lambs get into the field & wrong the crop

The sheep in eclipse, the wool in shadow

Goodbye to them as they complain

You pinch the edges of a tablet—your sleeping pill
feels like chastisement

(because you cannot swallow)

Night, where one becomes one hundred
& rain fills the craters

& the herd fords the flood

Goodbye to them as they complain

The flock in cataract, the indistinct fighting for sun-
flowers

(Behold the Lambs!)

With your crook, you immerse the wayward
& the Badlands drink them in

PAREIDOLIA

Sara Michas-Martin

I didn't notice last time
the hooked branches and fenced-out
sky—the leaves' flammable
glare. I didn't hear the bells swing
in my sideways glance or see
the creatures with spiked horns
clash in the bark's design.
In the ferns a nervous shadow, a person
stooped to bury
tokens in the ground. A squirrel
splashes the brush and I'm
spooked, a flood-burn
to the exterior. The lady in the briar
jostles the bats in her hair. Up close
they are heavy birds, thunderous
when they snap away.
Through filtered light I see
my lion take shape. I watch her
pace, maybe swagger, no
this time she's lying down.

ET AL.

Ed Roberson

for A.L.

A., you have at night a horse waiting outside,
its crazed eyes and mane, even painted to a still,
yell action, flame burning off it unconsumed neck
and head poked like a window into the room
where you are sleeping nightmare stakes a shape;

but night cramps never complete tightening
into homunculi or form, only location;
and that, only a wil o wisp of pain.
Unless, the move to get this maskless night wrestler
off you is to peel your muscle back counter

to its coil, body-lock of late channel dream.
But if the leg has been cut off into sleep
forever at this screen, the stabbing dream
has no wake, no recoil to resurrected balancing
of muscle tensions where no position is

but the static of not continuing,
—that unstood, continues tightening its stand
deeply felt where nothing shows.
nothing shows and still is not turned off,

doubly maskless night wrestler breaking legs
you don't even have and can't wake to deny.

~

You want to get even with a happening to you,
you want to put a hit out on event,
that particular turn of fate you want to have the shit
beat out of it for you, for fuckin' with you,
blowing off a leg that was important to you,

that ditch blown in the road you can't step back
over ever again, and as if the hand that dug it
doesn't matter, —grunts ain't shit anyway—
you want the head impossible that happened to you
wiped out, erased, made not, nothing, nada happening.

You want revenge on a past of something:
robber got away by way of his appearance
like yours of showing up, there in just that moment,
to run in opposite directions from each other forever,
though never escaping, never making up a loss.

~*~

Even with nothing to make up for, there is
the other leg of phantom limb we run,
the one still there, the limb on ordinary
steps we take that cut us off, cut from
that height we see ourselves to be.

Or maybe are, but something isn't right.
This time it is the ache you can't find; whole,
you can't tell where it hurts— lying down,
standing, seated in any chair, there is
no position in which you feel relief

from you can't tell where whatever it is
wakes you from waking as sharply as from sleep
by the pain.
the pain that wakes you when you *are* awake,
wakes you from wakening out of the pain of woke

is an awakening to *is*, the unsleeping, undreaming *is*,
the not waking from of *is*
is pain. is no phantom.

~

Dividing line open across erase
and redraw, end renewed to next, the living
air between placed step in consequence
can limn the dance of points through time in time to
hold, *en pointe*, change beyond consequence lived

though into the frame of closure, hemmed end,
a sutured hanging: point for the beholden of art.
Dancer, the pain is the irreversible.
This done business, this busyness of done,
chopping with its clean finish on our bodies

whole to go on or not, irreversibly here
and here not by one's own hand as much
as whatever blood covering your body
you have fought.
The pain does not know what

~

if color's only bodily receptor is sight ...
Where any black was a lack of whiteness,
absence of worth as white self is worthy,
whites' black was lack of likeness, a lesser body
Black in America can be a pain

in a body of yours you don't actually contain,
somebody else's phantom but your neck
strained keeping the country's feet on the ground
contained in as you are both
history in consequence and act, one growth.

Or is it one stump: the hanging burn
beyond the cutoff of not seeing
the grandparent in ourselves at the lynching
on the postcards smiling or no longer;
the past's itch that hurts to be scratched.

How do you make this here to be got at
with real hands but to gather in the mirror
come in from our absence, both in black.

AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIMENTAL POETRY FORUM

INTRODUCTION

TERRANCE HAYES: When I try recalling the specific impulse for this forum, I go back to my first encounters with the work of these writers. Part of me thinks the impulse was there before the impulse, the first time I read say, Melvin Tolson, or Gertrude Stein; Charles Olson or Wanda Coleman. What I felt (and still feel) was wonder. Awe. Curiosity. I wondered how they did what they do. It was a question that was a bit about process and a bit about circumstance. It was a question for "the inventors" about their "inventions." I'm wondering, Evie, about your own impulse to make this forum happen?

EVIE SHOCKLEY: I wanted this forum to come into being because I am deeply engaged with the kinds of projects that can make themselves at home under both the banner of "innovative" writing and the banner of "Black" writing (though sometimes this seems more difficult than it ought to be). As a poet, I struggle with the kinds of concerns that motivate the participants in this forum, as well as the writers you've mentioned, Terrance—and others, including Harryette Mullen, Ed Roberson, Brenda Hillman, and M. NourbeSe Philip, just to name a few more. I was excited to hear some of those concerns articulated and discussed by artists with whom my own writing is in conversation. I knew the forum would also benefit my work as a scholar writing about concepts of "Black aesthetics" in relation to formal innovation of the variety that these and other such artists have generated.

Given that there are more than a few writers who could have contributed significantly to this forum (and that's an understatement), could you talk about how you were thinking about the kinds of voices you wanted the forum to include, in relation to the shape you thought the conversation might take?

TERRANCE HAYES: Oh yeah, I can imagine another forum of poets of Ed Roberson's generation, or of poets like M. NourbeSe Philip—a forum of and about transcultural, transregional poetry. When I began thinking about writers who might participate in this forum, I think place/region/geography was on my mind. It seemed like a good organizing principle initially: the difference between not only a West Coast and East Coast poetics, but a midwestern experimentalism, a southern-style avant garde. But very quickly it became clear these writers were not interested in such simple parameters. This group gives us a conversation that is too open for territorial speculation—too open to be snagged by categories and nomenclatures. And yet something—many things bind them. It's not merely cultural, not Black, not generational, not aesthetic. Their attentiveness to the questions and issues and to each other attests to a kinship I don't think I fully anticipated or can describe without letting them speak for themselves. I don't feel unwelcome in the place they've made here, but I can't say I situate myself as easily within the conversation as you do, Evie. Maybe I just don't think I'm smart enough to sit at the table. Maybe I wanted to sit just outside the kitchen listening to the grown folk talk. This idea of "who is at the table and who isn't": what can we say to *jubilat* readers about the seats they might occupy in this conversation?

EVIE SHOCKLEY: I'm not so sure about your assessment of your own smarts, Terrance! But I think you're right about these writers being skeptical of labels. That speaks to me of a kind of radical openness that I see them espousing and acting upon, to varying degrees, in their own individual writing and in their ways of thinking about other poets' work.

They practice a sort of fearless “what if ... ?” that I associate with both imagination and generosity. What I hope is that *jubilat* readers will find spaces in this forum in which to exercise their own generous imaginations. I suspect that, like us, most readers will connect and identify with various moments in the conversation, whether from similarity of experience, thought, or desire; or from a place of difference that is curious about the space between here and there—or, most likely, from some combination of these. Aren’t most poets and readers of literature interested in how words as art articulate (speak to, speak from, speak into being) our thickly textured lives? If so, we need only step aside and let the forum speak for itself.

FORUM PARTICIPANTS

RENEE GLADMAN’s five books of poetry and prose include *To After That* (TOAF) and *Newcomer Can’t Swim*. The editor and publisher of the literary press Leon Works, she teaches at Brown University.

DOUGLAS KEARNEY is the author of two books of poetry, *Fear, Some* and *The Black Automaton*, selected for the 2008 National Poetry Series. A 2008 Whiting Foundation Award winner and recipient of fellowships from the Idyllwild Arts Summer Poetry workshop and the Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference, he is also a performer (with commissions from the Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota and the Studio Museum in Harlem). Kearney teaches at the California Institute of the Arts.

JOHN KEENE is the author of *Seismosis* (poetry-art dialogue, with Christopher Stackhouse), which earned a 2008 fellowship from the inaugural Pan-African Literary Forum, and the novel *Annotations*. The recipient of a 2005 Whiting Foundation Award for poetry and fiction, he teaches at Northwestern University.

DAWN LUNDY MARTIN is the author of *A Gathering of Matter/A Matter of Gathering*, winner of the 2006 Cave Canem Poetry Prize, and the co-editor of *The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism*. A founding member of the Black Took Collective and co-founder of the Third Wave Foundation, she teaches at the University of Pittsburgh.

FRED MOTEN is the author of three books of poetry, most recently *Hughson's Tavern*, and the critical book *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. He teaches at Duke University.

MENDI LEWIS OBADIKE is the author of *Armor and Flesh*, which won the Naomi Long Madgett Prize from Lotus Press. With her husband, Keith Obadike, she composed *The Sour Thunder, an Internet Opera* and curated *Crosstalk: American Speech Music*. Their opera-masquerade *Four Electric Ghosts* will open at The Kitchen in May 2009. Mendi is a Cotsen Postdoctoral Fellow in Race and Ethnicity in the Society of Fellows at Princeton University.

ROWAN RICARDO PHILLIPS is the author of the forthcoming collections *The Ground* (poetry) and *When Blackness Rhymes with Blackness: Essays on African-American Poetry* (criticism). He teaches at SUNY-Stony Brook.

TYRONE WILLIAMS is the author of two collections of poetry, *c.c.* and *On Spec*. He teaches at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio.

FORUM

To begin, we're interested in whether you see an important distinction between an "experimental poem" (perhaps as something which any ole' poet might try now and then) and an "experimental poetics" (perhaps as a governing "aesthetic"—and potentially "political"—position). How does each of you see yourself/your work in this regard—and how do you characterize or respond to other poets who may write an experimental piece on occasion, without evidencing a commitment to experimental poetry? The question is obviously not meant to disrespect anyone's choices; we're interested, however, in the degree to which issues of aesthetic "authenticity" may be at stake.

Some implicit and related questions following from the above might include: Is fluidity the nature of experimental poetry? Can anybody do it? Does it take something more or different for Black poets to be understood as experimental poets? Do concerns about "authenticity"—racial or aesthetic—(still?) (significantly?) shape Black poets' interest in embracing the label "experimental poet"? Maybe labels and labeling is the jumping-off place: "experimental" versus "innovative" versus "avant-garde" versus "postmodern" versus [your term here]...

JOHN KEENE: To start off the exchange, two possibly controversial statements: Isn't all poetry experimental at some level? Aren't all Black poetries experimental, to differing degrees, in relation to the local and broader contexts in which they exist? When we talk about experimental poetry, are we foregrounding form, or the message and content of the poem, or some fusion of the two? Would it be possible to have a formally conventional poem that could be read as experimental in light of how experimentalism is often talked about, and what would that look like? Wheatley's? Dunbar's? Hayden's poetry, for example?

Lorenzo Thomas has an essay in that wonderful issue of the journal *Tripwire* on Black innovative/experimental poetics, born out the Small Press Traffic Conference that giovanni singleton and Renee Gladman .

convened several years ago, in which he suggests that Blackness itself, in relation to our status quo and the larger social, political, and economic contexts, the historical context of American life, could be read as avant-garde. He necessarily complicates this assertion, to talk about a genealogy and history of (a) Black avant-garde practice, as do Erica Hunt and others at the conference. But I do find myself going back to this idea from time to time, wondering about Blackness as a sign and sign system, as a field that has often been a site, and certainly can be, of innovation, experimentation, freedom, in light of where we are politically right now. American Blackness and Black cultural production across the globe (and I'm thinking here about the Diaspora in particular) are also signs and vectors at times of Americanness and even, at times, of American imperial political and cultural hegemony across the globe, even as they also become means for resistance for others. How experimental aesthetics and poetics, a subset of aesthetics, in which critique and oppositionality are often implicit and constitutive, factor in light of this latter issue is also something I've been trying to think through.

Perhaps all poets do try "experimental" poems, in the sense of formal experimentation or content that falls outside their usual interests, but one way to read this might be to say that this means different things to different poets. For someone who is a strict formalist, a free-verse poem is an experiment, no? In terms of sustained formal and content innovation, I believe experimental/innovative/avant-garde/etc. poetics, and aesthetics, come into play. For some poets, I think this may be more or less a semicoherent and consistent aesthetics and poetics, while for others it might be patchwork, associative, improvisatory. But a commitment to an experimental aesthetics is distinct, at least in my mind, from experimenting from time to time.

I do have questions about how others read "fluidity." This is a slippery term. And who is it that's "understanding" Black poets as "experimental"?

Particularly in light of several generations of Black innovative formal practice—I'm thinking both of Wheatley as the beginning, but also perhaps of jumping forward, say, to Dunbar through to the Harlem Renaissance poets, the Black poetries of the mid-twentieth century (Brooks, Tolson, Atkins, etc.), the Black Arts poets and their contemporaries (like Lorde, Pritchard, Dumas, Loftin, Wright, Roberson, etc.), the Black gay poets of the early 1980s, etc. We could also add in other Black poetries, from across the Diaspora (people like Guillén and Mir, Brathwaite and Harris, etc.), whose work has been in dialogue with the line I lay out above. Such a lineage leads me to ask whether it isn't always about our own self-determination and reading. Or, proceeding from the approaches of some scholars and critics, what if we talk about the links, not just one way, but multiple ways, across racial and ethnic lines, gender and class lines, and so on? So, then, is the anxiety the question suggests to be viewed in relation to what might be considered a mainstream of contemporary Black poetry and poetics? This makes me think of Hughes's "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" in relation to the proscriptions laid down by Du Bois in "Criteria of Negro Art," and other Harlem Renaissance father figures in similar treatises. Or, to put it another way, in posing the question this way, to whom are you ceding the power to make such determinations, to legitimate Black (experimental/innovative) poetic practice and art?

Lastly, I was grappling with the issue of postmodernity and modernity, or rather postmodernism and modernism last spring for a class on twentieth-century American literature, and I kept realizing that some of the works we label in either category could fit into the other, which made me recall a comment Clyde Taylor made back in 1987 or 1988 at a Dark Room reading, when he asked whether Black folks could be "postmodern" when we allegedly hadn't even been "modern" yet. It was a great comment, though I know he would say that we couldn't have had "modernity" (in the West or elsewhere) or "modernism" without Black folks, which invokes Gilroy's notion of our centrality to the project of modernity, our

presence as a countersign, the agents of a counternarrative through which western modernity comes into being. Still, we're still left out of accounts of modernism and modernity, or rather, the relationship remains vexed for some non-Black scholars and critics still, though for others it isn't. Does that infect how we think about ourselves in light of the modern/postmodern binary? Does it even hold, given that postmodernism remains problematic decades after it entered the critical discourse?

As far as authenticity, I guess the question falls to who determines this. What is the benchmark? In a postessentialist, if not postracial, landscape, how might this be understood? Should the poet care? Does the reader?

FRED MOTEN: I usually disagree pretty strenuously with Stanley Crouch. The exceptions are when he's writing about certain music that he likes. I remember reading some liner notes he'd written for the World Sax Quartet in which he asserted that the entire jazz tradition is an avant-garde tradition. This formulation struck me immediately as being true but also as something that I wanted to be true insofar as it might guide my own understanding of and practice within that tradition. To me it meant that practicing in that tradition was always gonna be practice on the edge, in general, but on the edge of that tradition, in particular. And the edge was where I wanted to be, cutting, but also getting cut or submitting myself to the cut. And this seems to me to coincide with some things John said in his comment.

To have been thrown, or to bear the ineradicable trace of having been thrown, into a brutal and vile experiment and to have taken on and embraced and broken and disrupted experimentation as a mode of inhabitation and escape (inhabitation-in-escape): I think this is something akin, at least, to what John indexes; it's what Macey and Daphne Brooks talk about by way of the term "fugitivity"; what Mullen is getting at when she invokes "runaway tongues." They take something (away) from Crouch that

now he might disavow, that even then, perhaps, he only said in order to denigrate a certain Black experimentation. It's funny how you get things, I guess. Beyond this, it seems to me that if tradition and avant-garde are all bound up with one another, are interinanimate with one another in the Black aesthetic field, then this also means that experimentation and authenticity might be bound up with, rather than simply oppose, one another in that field. Maybe this convergence is what Blackness is. Another way to put it, by way of Adorno, is that Blackness, like jazz, is not what it is. Its authenticity lies in this dehiscence.

I would like to write a poetry of the authentic experiment, which has to be an open set. I don't know if I'll ever get there, but my sense of it is that discerning such a poetry would be a matter of something other than and more than being able to recognize whatever already given experimentalism in form or content. It seems to me that *Lady Sings the Blues* (Billie Holiday's ghostly, ghosted, fictive autobiography) and *Annotations* have an animation in common—that something common and of another commons animates them. This is what or where the experiment is. I think it is certainly only occasionally, if at all, that I have been able to get at the experiment myself. At the same time, I am embedded in it, bear its trace, am marked and inscribed by it. But I'm not trying to be disingenuous here. I feel like I'm really in the middle of an open question. Because I certainly have an affinity for work that is called experimental in the (paradoxically) conventional sense of that word. This is the work I want to support. The work I read with the most devotion and pleasure. And the poets who produce such work are the ones I feel most comfortable and most gratified being identified with, the ones whose tracks I try to follow and leave behind.

RENEE GLADMAN: I know that experimentation is often a choice, something formal that one wants to work out, some way of entering an alien field, crossing into a genre that one does not usually practice. But I have

always wanted to think of it as a result of a set of conditions that—once one decided to look into those conditions—made it impossible to write “straight.” My problem in writing is that of experience—whether real or imagined. The root of narrative, of the sentence itself, is experience, coming to terms with it. The way we structure our sentences in English—always a subject doing something in space and time—requires us to make constant decisions about occurrence, fluidity, and capture. By *capture*, I mean how much of the experience in question one can actually represent in language.

I am drawn to poetry because in its often fragmented nature there is room to grapple with the utterance of experience, to break it down to even the phonetic level. I find that fiction—especially conventional fiction—tries to suspend the difficulties. But what is great about fiction, or rather prose (which pushes against the limits of fiction), is that in having to face the sentence, again and again, in the context of building or skirting or dismantling some kind of narrative, you make contact with the mechanics of experience. I think working consciously in language has to make you aware of the minute gestures of thought such that the dance of that marks the look of your language. The hyperawareness makes you exploratory.

What is cool is to add identifiers such as “Blackness” or “queerness” to the question of experience. How quickly that (historical) narrative of wholeness, of centeredness, of capture breaks down. I remember thinking in the late 1980s that there is nothing more punk rock than being a Black person in the United States. (Does the election of Obama change this?) John, I love your question: aren’t all Black poetries experimental, to differing degrees, in relation to the local and broader contexts in which they exist? On one hand, I think, yes. On the other, I have wanted more. After you tell the story, after you throw groove onto it, keep going. What is next? The Black Arts movement was incredible in exploding that possibility. And this is not to say not much has happened since then. Plenty has. But I can’t get over the sense that “experimentation” is still viewed

as something that only White people do. That it is extra, unnecessary. I'd love to know, as writers, what is at stake for you all when you use that word (experimentation), when you write that way.

DAWN LUNDY MARTIN: It strikes me that the sign—"Black" or "Blackness"—is particularly unreadable or disconnected from that idea, object, or being that might otherwise be signified. When we frame Blackness as—forgive me—"always already" radical or innovative in some way, are we implying that because the figures of Blackness (unrecognizable and despairing as such), who appear to rub up against, or unravel, the fabric of the conventional, do not do so because of what they do, but because of their very be-ing (the is-ness of one's existence)? Is Black be-ing a way, then, of speaking alternatively? I want to suggest another option: that the Black identity is the thing that is often the intended object of the said. That it seeks and seeks to be said. So, then. The Black be-ing is the object of the Black be-ing's damp and unrelenting desire to be spoken, but the speaking itself falls over into some dark indecipherability. It is here, perhaps, in this failed attempt—down the rabbit hole—that speaking approaches an approximation of the "authentic."

Identity—whether it be a claim of gender, race, sexual orientation, yadda yadda yadda—is always peeking its ugly head out of the woodpile in increasingly confusing guises. We might say, when the "I" speaks, it must first swallow its own tongue, that there is some invested relief in the garble. The "I"-as-possibility demands an engagement with the poetic that resists conventional ways of speaking. Here, "innovation" or "experimentation" is compelled into relationship with that potential subjectivity. I believe I'm agreeing with Renee, here, that there are certain "conditions"—one of those conditions being Blackness itself—which stipulate, for some writers (I'm one of them), that the languages and forms of investigation should not and cannot offer up anything as coherent as a clear ringing.

DOUGLAS KEARNEY: I began with this long exploration of the concept of "experimentation." I'm chucking that in favor of wrestling with Renee's question: "what is at stake for you all when you use that word [experimentation], when you write that way?" What I will cannibalize from my other piece is:

1. That experiment is a conscious pursuit of "findings"—which may or may not be the final poem as "result"—through a thought-out process and a specific set of elements.
2. An experiment repeated without any variation is no longer an experiment, because you *know* what will happen (got that from William H. Gass's "Anywhere but Kansas"). It has become, instead, performance.
3. A briar patch sprouts when one attempts to metaphorize "experiment" from science to poetry in that we may not agree on the essential elements of "a poem" in the same way we might the elements of "water" (H₂O). As such, the elements of poetic experiment are more slippery than even Hg.
4. That the potential poem is the lab. But things other than experiments happen in labs. Sometimes serendipitous discoveries happen outside the parameters of an experiment (penicillin, anyone?). Therefore, every poem may not be an experiment. The poem is a place where all kinds of things can happen.

From there to Renee.

What's at stake for me when I'm experimenting is a kind of fidelity to the process as what I can only call "honest work" surrounded by idiolectic shell games, feints and masks. Most of my experiments are, to use Dawn's word, "investigations" into *reading* and *writing* as verbs. I want to better

understand these practices, not just insist that they exist and, therefore, produce and feed poems into the Tradition". Experimentation is a way of conducting these investigations and, when I am at my best, determines why the poems I write look the way they do.

That being said, the poems are full of the stuff that I am full of (insert smart remark here), and that includes the experiment itself. For example, my own sense of reading and writing is: surface, marking, and eye. Thus, it extends from poems and enjoyment of poetry to how we inscribe and perceive difference. When I write an experimental poem, my ambition is to encourage the readers to read more than the poem, or, more precisely, to use the poem as a Danger Room in which they can practice strategies for reading the world and their own texts within it. After all, I, too, am reading what I have written. A successful experimental poem for me must provide a space in which its particular challenges are rewarded ultimately with the ache and pleasure that comes with a new way of thinking. My own interests drive me to also want musical and graphical pleasure as a part of the exchange.

Now: a confession. I have to admit some worry over the notion that Black folks are, by virtue of origin, intrinsically experimental (Posdnous' line about "the projects" from "Stakes Is High" echoes in the break); not from any critical framework, but from the crawling dread that comes when we insist Black folks are intrinsically anything. If we are experimental, are White folks the control? Do we have disproportionate numbers in the NBA because we are "naturally better at basketball" or because of generic, culturally rewarded choices to develop basketball skill sets? Again, this is a belly yelp, not a brain-based critique, and I am almost embarrassed to air it in this context, except that this is the context where I might get the most useful responses.

FRED MOTEN: Can performance be repeated without variation? Can an experiment? Will it ever have been possible to still an original movement between poetry and science? This metaphor, which seems to have always been there and never started anywhere, can't be stopped. So the poem becomes a lab, which is cool. It appears that science can't be dropped. We run (in) the history of dropped science. Poetry drops the universal science of language like a bad habit. The experiment turns out to make the material unruly. The sentences won't act right. The unprecedented becomes unpredictable. We run on, furious and green and Black, and get suspended. Say it over and over again every night to see how it sounds. It sounds good. Clear, like Muddy.

I've been writing a lot over the last fifteen years in the hope of properly framing the question concerning Blackness or, perhaps more precisely, the experience of Blackness (which is not the same as what Fanon called "the lived experience of the Black," because Blackness and the Black, or Blackness and Black people are not one in the same). The mode that writing has taken up—under constraint, as Renee suggests, and I am given to the enjoyment of these constraints—is experimental. My research has led me to a tentative answer. That idea, object, or being that might otherwise be signified, but which has not otherwise been signified, and which has therefore taken its character, in part, from the way that it has been signified, and the constraints and liberties that correspond to that signification, and the association with the various things and people that have suffered and enjoyed a proximate signification, is experiment. I experiment in writing because I am in search of an ongoing experiment that has been for a long time now called Blackness.

It is ironic that experimentalism can be that to which an appeal is made in the interest of a disavowal of the experiment. And what is more terrible than to have been born/e into the lust for and aversion to difference? But this is everybody's story. For the last five hundred years, it has been assigned

a proper name. What horrors, but also what responsibilities, accrue to the ones who have also been assigned that name? I understand the tradition I referred to in my previous comment as one in which the conduction of the experiment we are is seized, surreptitiously stolen, and stolen away from, by way of secret gestures and open suggestions. I really love what it is to have embraced this affinity for dispossession, what it means to claim the general burden—arbitrarily and specifically imposed—that no one wants. Experimental research into the nature and history of the experiment is important, because it's beautiful and because it staves off enclosure; because you can make a new sound or a new shape. The delta (which is to say change) is where and what it's always been. Rooted and out there. Radical, serial self-exception. Like Renee said: "On one hand, I think, yes. On the other, I have wanted more." This is what it's always been.

Blackness and Black people are not one in the same. Blackness—"the idea, object, or being that might otherwise be signified"—is not *the* or *an* exclusive property of Black people. The projects are not the native home of Blackness, though it took a native tongue to intimate this. Blackness is, however, as Dawn implies in that Lacanian way ("the real is that which might have been otherwise"). This is to say that Blackness is both project and projection. Having been imposed upon certain people, certain of those people choose to claim it, thereby committing themselves to the experimental, experiential process of finding it or of pursuing findings of it, as Douglas sez, in and (up) against the sentence, as Renee says. What is it to pursue what has been imposed upon you? What is it to claim, to desire, the imposition that you carry and, in carrying, desiring, pursuing, constantly transform, submitting it every day to a principle of uncertainty? Maybe you can know something of the breakneck speed or imperceptible slowness of Blackness, but only if you relinquish any hope to fix its local habitations or its names. And it is only insofar as the ob/verse of this is also true that we are justified in agreeing with Rakim that "it ain't where you from, it's where you at."

By way of Douglas, I would like to submit that Blackness is the fugitive pursuit of findings (names, sounds) on or of Blackness—this intrinsic tendency to make differences to which we are all given and which the tendency to regulate, to which we are all given, seeks to capture and exclude. It is entirely arbitrary that the first tendency is called Blackness, is yoked to people who are called Black; that it has been so called, and for so long, has left its inscription as some particular modalities and inflections of the interplay of finding and pursuit. What was once arbitrary is no longer. The critical or theoretical or poetic return to that originary, arbitrary moment seems to me to be impossible, but even if it were, I don't know what it would accomplish. Would it produce something like a kind of freedom? Perhaps, but the constraints inherent in such freedom make the experience/experiment of constant escape look and feel and sound like jubilee. Would it lend itself to a greater and more severe sociological accuracy? Perhaps, but it would do so at the expense of what remains incalculable in social life (as Du Bois once said). It is important, I think, to choose one's constraints wisely.

To say that Blackness is intrinsically experimental is not the same thing as to say that Black folks are intrinsically experimental. Black folks are intrinsically many things—folks, for instance—but the problem is not their being intrinsically anything, or even their being intrinsically experimental, but their having, insofar as everyone has, an intrinsic relation to the idea, object, or being that might otherwise be signified but is not. This leads back to the question concerning what that idea, object, or being is. It is the experiment, where experiment is understood as making differences. I like to think that experience is making differences. Experiment and experience converge in/as the performance of life, as a form of life, which constantly escapes, as Foucault says. In attempting to produce and discover the fugitive path, one can't help but be in and out of (a) line, tearing shit up, pressing on things, not because this is how we do it but (and here I hope I only seem to contradict myself) because this is who we are. I hope this is clear as a drell.

RENEE GLADMAN: I love how quickly we have moved into that impossible place, which is also one of the most productive for thought, where we grasp the unsayable long enough to hear a trace of it, long enough to know we want that sound, before it is absorbed into the general noise around us. Being Black trying to get at Blackness. Not navel-gazing. But staring at my hand, going, "Wait, what is it? Is it here? They said it would be." I'm still soaking up all the amazing complexities of the forum so far, but I thought I'd throw out another question. Fred's idea of Blackness as "the fugitive pursuit of findings (names, sounds) on or of Blackness" is rich, brilliant, and immediately brings to mind "measure." How do you know when you've found it [Blackness]? How much of it do you need? I wonder this about my own work. I cannot strip my characters of my own perceived place in the world, regardless of their genders or nationalities. Their pursuit is my pursuit. I want to say that that pursuit *is* Blackness but I haven't utilized any of the acknowledged signs. Is that the fugitive part? How do you enter work into the conversation that doesn't, at least not immediately, act "Black"?

ROWAN RICARDO PHILLIPS: We're certainly are in the most self-conscious of eras. Who knows how long it will last? We've gone from dealing with questions of experimentation to a discussion of the avant-garde in the blink of an eye. But are the two the same?

"Avant-garde" implies group, mission, ideology, a stance. "Experiment" is more iridescent, more diffracted, more romantic. For poets, experimentation is an expression of the will and a confrontation with the history of their art. But this doesn't mean that an experiment inherently yields something experimental. For example, have you taught a poetry student who used the lower-case "i" and ampersand because they are (in the case of "i") revolting against the dominance of the speaking subject or (in the case of "&") granting their writing more instantaneity? And then we have to break it to them that their experiment is not an experimental poem

but rather part of a tradition that has an extensive literary and critical history behind it. That these student-poets have invested in the personal and subjective aspects of experimentation is exciting for them and for we who teach them. But I do get the sense that many would rather get right to being called avant-garde and skip the less exciting parts, which include spending a great deal of time working in solitude and making a student of your intuition. These are the parts that tend to not be very exciting. In fact, they can be terrifying at times.

This is an example of the weight and burden terms like "experimental" and "avant-garde" place upon the imagination. When faced with the fact that what you thought was an experiment is old news, where do you go? Do you delve further into the history of what you were trying to do, or do you simply go forward in search of the next experiment? Visual experiments (concrete poems, etc.) are more muscular and in that sense announce their intentions with immediate force. But nuanced experiments can offer many intriguing tones and textures. "Those Winter Sundays" by Robert Hayden is a love sonnet to an absent Black man: Hayden's father. Though it doesn't seem so at all, the treatment of the subject is Petrarchan. Petrarch's idealized Laura becomes a very real—and very flawed—William Hayden. Hayden has reached down the throat of the sonnet to pull it inside out. The poem makes no gesture toward being experimental, but it's a revolution; it expands what we think the sonnet can do and is used for. And yet the experiment is so delicate: the poem barely seems a sonnet at all. The terms by which we consider poems experiments have much to do with what we can readily see in poems. And that's a shame.

There is little value in experiment without our facing the risk that our experiments are rehashing something someone somewhere has done before. Therefore, the challenge before us is to love what we do whether it manages to meet our expectations of being experimental or not. That's the work. To make it provoke. To make it seduce. To make it convince.

When the horns ask "So What?" in the Miles Davis song of the same name, the players don't stop, they bring more to the table. And the playing gets better. And that's when the song really begins.

The skeptical imagination has a place in this conversation since the idea or will to deem something experimental should always inevitably contend with its antagonist: healthy, robust skepticism. I am highly skeptical of all [all x is y] formulations because I learn nothing from them. If [all x is y], why have an x or a y ? Whether x is Black art or Blackness, what do I learn by claiming that all of it is avant-garde? So what? And, remembering that it takes all kinds to make the world go 'round: what about those Black writers (they must be out there somewhere) who wouldn't want their work to be considered avant-garde? We shouldn't place value on these terms at the expense of the complexity of art, regardless of whether we like the outcome or not. To do so only reduces art as we veer towards being self-congratulatory and self-aggrandizing. Until the mid-nineteenth century, "avant-garde" was a military term. When the word began to take on literary significance among the artists and intellectuals of Paris, Baudelaire deemed it best suited for those "*qui ne peuvent penser qu'en société*" (who can only think collectively).

TYRONE WILLIAMS: Back in town and iced in.... It is fitting that this discussion initiated while I was away because, like so many of the stances/positions staked out here (however tentative), I know I write from a position of away-ness, of belatedness, of entering a conversation-quarargument, and—as Douglas said/implied—I write from everything that has made me *me* up to this moment. I feel closest to the initial statements made by Dawn and Fred, though regarding the terms we were presented with—experiment, Black, African American, innovation, avant-garde, etc.—I feel the need to clarify for my own sake what is at stake in each of these terms. Everything said so far affirms that the experimental, however contextualized (human be-ing, poetics, nation, etc.), is essentially what

happens at the horizon of what we know, what we do, what we are. As such, it is the *as if*, a stab at, a guess, an essaying, heuristic, temporary, and so forth. I am not particularly interested in experimental poetry *per se*. I am interested in avant-garde poetics—experimental poetry *per alia*—which encompasses “form,” “content,” “context,” etc. Like Dawn, and because I grew up in Detroit when I did, I am wary of essentializing (*per se-ing*) Black people or Black culture (e.g., jazz, hip-hop) as avant-garde or innovative. On some level I feel like we could just post our poems, because I know some of them grapple explicitly with these issues (check out Fred’s new book).

JOHN KEENE: Since I broached the idea that Lorenzo Thomas posed at that landmark conference all those years ago, let me restate: I don’t think either he or I believes that Blackness—and I was clear about approaching this from a postessentialist position—was constitutively “avant-garde”; he just tosses out the idea to get people thinking about a genealogy of the Black avant-garde, which as Renee (I think) suggests does have to do with historicity, ideology, futurity, politics in aesthetics, etc. Nevertheless, I thought it was quite provocative, thus my opening gambit. Fred’s comments about fugitivity and Blackness are profound and ones I’ll defer to (like his subtle dropping of Heideggerian science, and Renee’s citation of another tradition with “measure,” etc.), but around the site/sight of Blackness I’d also echo what Robert Reid-Pharr says in his new book, *Once You Go Black*, which is that it’s “a site of becoming, rather than a locus of fixed tradition.” And so on.

That said, to answer Renee’s specific question about what was and is at stake in my own work, I’ve been less concerned overtly with “experimentation” or the “avant-garde” *per se* than with attempting—and I’m wary of the scientific metaphors even though I dropped a lot of them, from geology and mathematics (two fields that endlessly interest and confound me), in my last book—with problems of speaking, of writing, of language as a

means and vector of representation and embodiment, with my struggles and difficulties around these and other issues and concepts, in and through the text. To talk about the last book, since I've mentioned it, I had several aims in mind. The first aim, after someone else had suggested that Chris Stackhouse and I create the book together—after this person had created a pretext without telling us, which was a lovely gesture—was to create the book with him, but in a dialogically collaborative fashion. The literal presence of dialogues, of transcripts of our exchanges (and those with others, such as Mendi Obadike), our workings through, but also as open spaces for improvisation, by eye or in the moment itself, as performance and event, appear throughout the book. It screams with them. Which meant that I had to come correct and think against myself, write against myself, against my tendencies, and be willing to record and then release those struggles into the final texts themselves.

Another aim was to write about abstract art by Black folks, by a specific Black person (Chris), while being aware that we were working in the wake of the silences around certain visual and plastic abstractionists like William White, who were Black, and others who have received some acclaim, like Sam Gilliam. I wanted some of this psychological and affective labor, which I think Geoffrey Jacques and some other folks registered in the tension between language and voice, between language poetry's project and the (Black) voicings in the book, to come through. This also entailed writing in and around the silences that encircle some ancestors like Norman Pritchard, whose "muscular" concretions produced ... a near zero sum of critical engagement (though Kevin Young, bless him, was on the project back in college, and Aldon Nielsen also has done some great work around Pritchard).

Fred talks about his long-term search, whose products are in part his brilliant books, and that makes me note that I also wanted to write in a critical vein that was not scholarly, because I'm not a scholar by any measure,

nor a theorist or even capable of much theorizing, though I do like (a lot of) theory's projects. I was aiming to use the pressure of certain critical theories and lenses that might be viewed under certain circumstances as problematic (Kant, Bloch, etc.)—which is to say, to trouble the notion of criticism and genre directly in relation to this collaborative conversation, its process, and its production. This is why the book asserts repeatedly that the texts are “texts” or “essays” in the sense of “attempt” and not “poems.” I also wanted to explore the practice of failure, which is to say, what happens when you go in the lab/garden/woodshed/climate-controlled room and you produce this thing that almost works but maybe doesn't, whose strivings, whose flight towards and away from, is all you get, but it remains in conversation with all that's around it. Dawn talks about this in relation to authenticity, which is cool, so I'm giving her props on this. At certain points, I tried to speak directly about these issues, which I was taught not to do: failure, tedium, “egos eros and what slows us,” the whole brink of the hand and what doesn't happen, and all that stuff. To put it another way, truth. Another aim, and this I think relates directly to Doug's work, which I admire tremendously, was to force myself to create work that could be performed in multiple ways, that could always be a new text, a different text, just as Chris's drawings could be viewed, enjoyed, understood, interpreted, in multiple ways, or not at all. So there are texts in the text that could be read polynomially (is that the right word?—see, I can't let go of the science), and I've made an effort to show how this works, which is something that none of my other previous work really did—which is another way of saying that this was, for me, a revolutionary experiment.

I could go on, but I'll just say that finally I also wanted to write a queer text, particularly because I was working with a poet and visual artist, a brotha, Chris, who is straight (I note my anxiety about noting this, just in case someone misreads and wants to start rumors, etc.), but whose own work—visual, poetic—is always freaking form in exciting ways, in queer ways. I wasn't sure, in the austerity of the product, that we'd gotten there,

but a queer writer friend, who works between languages and genders/genres, was the first to identify this to me, helping me to think how the collaboration exceeds its categories, itself, is open and messy and wild—is, as Sedgwick writes in *Tendencies*, as much about the “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically ... the experimental linguistic, epistemological, representational, political adventures” as about the abstraction and abstract practice, the history of art historical commentary, aesthetic theory, and all that good stuff. Now E. Patrick Johnson, Cathy Cohen, Roderick Ferguson, Rinaldo Walcott, and others rightly rethink queerness in relation to questions of race, ethnicity, class, and so on. But what I’m always after are these “adventures,” which I think is another way (imperfectly) of talking about the fugitive search that Fred cites, invoking Douglass, the flight, the fight, and we could go and on, just keep running and seeking and making, escaping to and through our own minds towards that necessary place or places (Mark Anthony Neal notes that Fred wrote this about Harriet Jacobs), which is what poetics are ultimately about, right?

I promise I’m going to stop soon, but Renee writes:

I find that fiction—especially conventional fiction—tries to suspend the difficulties. But what is great about fiction, or rather prose (which pushes against the limits of fiction), is that in having to face the sentence, again and again, in the context of building or skirting or dismantling some kind of narrative, you make contact with the mechanics of experience. I think working consciously in language has to make you aware of the minute gestures of thought such that the dance of that marks the look of your language. The hyperawareness makes you exploratory.

This idea of the exploratory—facing it is what animates so much of what I do. I used to get annoyed when people would focus on “process,” though I think—and here I invoke Lacan (since Fred did, chatting with Dawn) concerning the ethics of process—about how fiction leads one to the truth, and this excites me about where a new work might lead. I’ll just add that I do write prose fiction as opposed to prose more broadly, which I also try, and although we haven’t discussed the economic contexts that inform all of our work(s), the pressure to create “conventional fiction,” which suspends the difficulties, is tremendous. So when I write fiction, or a work that I consciously place in that field, I’m always trying to keep as much of the exploratory, the adventure, the flight, in there, too. This makes me think about Rowan’s comments about Hayden’s “Those Winter Sundays,” which I memorized for Michael Harper’s workshop at Cave Canem, and which sometimes brings me to tears when I get to the lines about

No one ever thanked him.

I would wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.

...

and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

and him, who had “polished my good shoes as well,” and I can viscerally feel the pain. I have felt that pain, that regret. I have been that lyric speaker, and I’m reminded—as Sarah Schulman once reminded me, years ago—that sometimes the simplest forms, the most seemingly conventional, are the appropriate ones for certain things you want to, must, convey. And what you get goes off like dynamite because no one’s expecting it. So sometimes I have work that on the surface looks fairly conventional, whether it’s called fiction or poetry or whatever, but that artifact of the experiment of writing and experience produces something that doesn’t look or sound like anything conventional at all.

I'll stop here, but I am really intrigued by Renee's question, "How do you enter work into the conversation that doesn't, at least not immediately, act Black? So let's at it!

TYRONE WILLIAMS: Since my response was, even for me, far too cryptic and abbreviated, I'll take another pass, responding directly to John's comment. The economic context he cites as underdiscussed so far is precisely the focus of my own critical prose (and that is conventional, regarding academia). I received an e-mail from Chris Stackhouse just before John's. I was trying to get Chris and Geoffrey here for a dual/duet reading but had no funds to do so, so I approached our VP for diversity. She agreed to fund the readings but wanted—understandably—to narrow "diversity" to her Black History Month program, to have both explain how their work relates to Black Studies, etc. Chris's response was heated (I won't quote him without his permission) and took up some of the issues John would outline in his e-mail—which came shortly after Chris's.... The economic pressures on writers of prose fiction or genre-crossing prose would increase, I imagine, as one's writing moves farther out into what John calls the "adventures" of attempting. That is, poetry would seem to have fewer economic stakes/minefields to negotiate. As we all know, however, the cultural stakes—e.g., what counts as "Black" poetry by publishers (from the trade houses to independent publishers)—can be just as thorny. Add to that, then, the "issue" of sexual orientation, and this returns us to the question of form, content, etc., re experimentation, essaying, innovation, etc. I wrote a short, inadequate review years ago on a few Black gay poets—specifically, Carl Phillips, Reginald Shepherd, Cyrus Cassells, and Melvin B. Dixon. I'd just begun to think about the complex relationships between publication (and all four were associated with midlevel poetry publishers), form (I thought Shepherd the most interesting of the four), content (I loved—still love—the sensuous lines of Cassells and the starkness of Phillips' post-*In the Blood* books), and sexual orientation (least discussed in that piece). All this to say that

semiosis seems to enact all our concerns thus far articulated.... Re Lorenzo: Perhaps because I miss him (and, now, Reginald), I go back to our brief, all too infrequent conversations, and I want to make sure my last comment was understood regarding John's provocative gambit.—Lorenzo was absolutely right that Blackness per se, to say nothing of Black people, may be understood as avant-garde (with all the attendant political and cultural attachments...), as a sign, as a "group," as fixation, idea, horror, exotic, etc. That's what I meant by the horizon of the experimental—it all depends on where one is positioned, and of course you can never "get there" however fast you run....

RENEE GLADMAN: In the words of an Afronaut y Amigos mix, "Pleasure's all mine. Just come inside. Please feel inclined. To relax your mind." I propose a detour, or a tenderizing of our approach, perhaps to get to a more gut-level space, where you find yourself in the moment before writing, that gesture of the hand. What are your questions, in relation to utterance, the page, identity?

DAWN LUNDY MARTIN: Part of me, I'll admit, wants to write a whole book of collard greens poems, and my grandmother—rest her soul—in the kitchen cooking them up with a kerchief around her head humming Negro spirituals (despite, of course, her race/gender plight as a poor Black woman in the South with five children—all girls—and a dead husband). A kind of supersaturated text, to borrow a phrase from Aldon Nielsen's writing about Melvin B. Tolson, that persistently and reiteratively vis-a-vis, say Kara Walker's hypersexual, scatological silhouettes or Ellen Gallagher's pre-eXelento and -DeLuxe abstractions of the archetypal Sambo. So I want to answer Renee's provocative question by asking another question. What would it mean to enter work into the conversation that acts too Black? That dances when the music has stopped? A work that exhumes, plays with, and complicates the bodily sites of raced disciplines? I think here of Ronaldo V. Wilson's new book, *Narrative of the Life of the Brown*

Boy and the White Man, in this vein—a quasi revision of a New Negro slave narrative, this one of reversal, of love, of sublime queer perversity. The performance work of the Black Took Collective (a group I founded with Ronaldo and Duriel E. Harris) investigates Blackness with a large, choking dose of the ironic, shedding, we hope, by degrees the expectation of “Blackness” with an abiding nod toward [it].

I’m interested in how (de)formed figures of Blackness haunt us, how part of any work by an artist who is “Black” is to in some way negotiate the question of how the work speaks, its resonant “voice” being in non-negotiable dialogue with some unseen and unreachable presence, in a mode, perhaps, of apostrophe.

TYRONE WILLIAMS: ‘Kay—Renee’s gut-level check: one sign of which might be the books/authors you return to compulsively. For me that’s Wright and Ellison, and I’m always on the lookout for spin-offs (Colson Whitehead), rebuttals (Percival Everett), etc. In poetry I go through phases of obsessively reading everything by the writer—just off the top of my head I had, in college, my Artaud, Howe (Susan), Kathy Acker, O’Hara, and, of course Baraka, years. I’ve been through my Edward Hirsch, Kevin Young, Harryette Mullen, Erica Hunt, Yusef Komunyakaa, Paul Celan, and Carl Phillips phases. So these and more must all be in my head before I put pen to paper (I still do). But, I have to say, sometimes I write with specific audiences in mind. Sometimes it’s my father, sometimes my sisters, and I have my share of turnip green poems. I guess I still want to believe that the guy who just ended another shift at the plant (my father worked at GM, Chrysler, and Ford before finding his career—driving a truck) can get the spirit—and that’s more important to me than “meaning”—of my work.... At the same time, Dawn reminds us that we can’t fall for that “we’re just folks” game, even if that’s truly what some part of us wants to be true....

DOUGLAS KEARNEY: Dawn, you mention Kara Walker. I met her work without any prior prep—no hipster word of mouth, no reviews—up on the wall at the Walker in Minneapolis in 1997. Dag. I remember laughing and then clapping my hand over my mouth in anxiety and laughing, only half-nervous, again. A couple of years later, I decided I wanted to write a poem that could do that. I think the closest I've come is "Swimchant for Nigger Mer-folk (an Aquaboogie in Lapis)" for how it deals with a tragedy wept and speeched into a romantic damn-near liturgical trope: the Middle Passage. John spoke generously about my work, which is full of calculated failures (something else John discusses about his own work, and it is an ambition we share) like trying to replicate silhouette, which though ambiguous, rendered in tableaux as Walker works, manages to be narrative. To flow and be static.

Too Black? It is problematic to associate Blackness with "dirt"; instead, let's identify dirt as Mary Douglas does: "matter out of place." That there might work.

I read a great interview between D'Angelo and ?uestlove about dirt. Sonic dirt. D'Angelo was discussing what he wanted to do in *Voodoo* versus *Brown Sugar* (turns out, he felt *BS* was too polished). Those mutters, murmurs, and slurs. The de-quantized drums and how he pressed ?uest to play so far behind the beat the drummer was concerned the critics would murder him. Just last October, I was talking to Amaud Jamaul Johnson about how I wanted to write with distortion—not exaggeration, but with actual Hendrix fuzz. The rasp that's like sandpaper clapboard in the chapel of Aretha Franklin's "ah." Or the stubborn muddy threats and shucks of *There's a Riot Going On*. Harryette Mullen's double-talk and be-bab. There's Kalamu Ya Salaam's call for messier poetry. I recently sent Dawn a personal note of thanks, because her own work gave me a new sense of how to relate to language for the new writing I'd like to do. And maybe the distortion (which I first tried approximating in multivocal poems)

and feedback is in syntax evasion. Being out of line means you're acting out of place. Using street talk in the house. Going out and not showing home training. Dirty-dirty.

And I recall Fred's interview from *Callaloo* where he articulates a way of pursuing interdisciplinarity—that has been a lodestone for me—but also where he insists that the elusive language of the personal not gussied up for company is a strategy of a fugitive poetics (did I get that right, Fred?). And I'm wondering if that might be a conceptual rhyme with John's "In the end, refuse signature" or whether the former enthusiastically directs us to put one's signature all over everything like graffiti (which, with its frequently encrypted design, proliferation, and use of alias might ultimately still be a refusal to sign).

I met Renee briefly at REDCAT in L.A. a year or so back—she was talking about syntax as a kind of city, or at least paralleling cities and syntax. And we spoke too briefly about how it might read to graffiti over the words filling this syntax city. And I wonder now, can one graffiti over one's own work? Would a poem that wanted to tell "the secret" of graffiti (quote-enclosed concept cribbed from Moten) have to be printed over a tax form or an ad for soda?

Up to now, my attempts to deal in this kind of thing have largely been through typography. The next book, *The Black Automaton*, is full of that stuff. Text careens and overlaps, makes a mess, tries to worry the line between word and picture, like a wildstyle. This isn't new, of course. But I've been trying to think about how aligned phrases set within a block of text might suggest the actual structure of a drum solo or a J Dilla chop and loop. Or how to create graphically layered text to suggest voices shouting over each other à la Massin's design for *The Bald Soprano*. Technology has played gatekeeper or foil to a lot of the rasp and sampling (which I'm trying to understand as a form of intentional misquotation—another

kind of distortion) I'm digging, so using design programs instead of word processing ones feels right. To this end I'm always trying to figure more accessible/cheaper (though not yet as cheap as hand-cutting) methods. (Hint: use PowerPoint. It's frame-based just liked InDesign and Quark; all you have to do is print out your slides.) This brings me, sort of, to Renee's question.

When I begin to understand that a poem might need to be more typographically adventurous, I either sketch it that way in my journal or switch to InDesign. I don't want the typography to be chrome spinners but essential to the composition. Recently, I've been writing poems in five parts. I think it's an essay type of synthesis. The concerns of these poems have been a kind of crossroads of intellectual ideas and blood/body. Dawn's mention of the spiritual hum and bandana knot has a partner in a recent draft called "The Slaves." I was driven to this after reading much of a book of poems that explored the trope admirably. Still, I wanted to know why we keep doing it. Which, of course, led me to ask why might I have any beef with grandmothers and kitchens (the former, a question I've written about before). And in "The Slaves," as in "The Devils," "The Death of the Death of," and "The Post-," I'm trying to use a critical approach which I hope is native to a Black signifyin' via a syntax and codeshifting I think is at least connected to our communication methodologies. (Is the dozens both theory and praxis? Hmph.) And this forum interests me because of how we're talking near as much as what we're talking about!

I know of a few texts already that I hope demonstrate a Negro-grown critical theory. But any recommendations would be appreciated, and perhaps our fine readers would like them, too. I'm also looking forward to reading the work of folks I'm just meeting in this forum.

As far as economics, I used to feel very wise for saying about poetry: "If nobody is watching you, you might as well be naked." I've found through

some fortunate events that sometimes people are watching you. I won't pretend to have an answer for this, only an anecdote, and then I shut up. CalArts, where I teach and got my MFA, has what can generally be called an anticommercial stance. Yet I went to a lecture in the Graphic Design Department just this week, and the lecturer had no qualms about discussing doing design for clients as a means to support his own work and being paid well for it.

It was oddly refreshing.

We'd like to throw one more question (or cluster of questions, more accurately) on the table: How important is the sense of being a part of an avant-garde or experimental community to your work? Why? And if it does matter to you, how do you find or create that community? What constitutes your belonging: location (how much does region bear on your ability to produce/belong/resist?); readership (this is in part concerned with your ideas about creating points of entry for potential readers into unconventional work, and in part a general invitation for you all to talk more about issues of audience [following Tyrone's mention of his father as addressee and Renee's question about work that isn't "Black" on its face]); shared philosophy/poetics (this goes to Doug's recent comment which gets at what or how one develops and approaches a working aesthetic)?

RENEE GLADMAN: I appreciate Douglas's last comment to the forum in how it punctuates the larger question about community, that there is a way we can read or witness (by attending readings, panels) ourselves into conversation with each other. While I don't think it is necessary to name a contemporary Black avant-garde as if it's a movement or some centrally located event that everybody is attending, I do think forums of this nature are vital in providing support for each of us doing our own totally idiosyncratic, Black (as we determine it)-inflected work. This "Negro-grown critical theory" Doug mentioned being a collective thinking

of peers, happening now, about now. The ideas brought up over this week or so are brilliant and, of course, incomplete. That feeling that we have just started, just walked in the door. Maybe having had a drink or a piece of shrimp, but not met everybody, not sat down yet. But we are nearly out of time. So I would love to have people jump back in. It's definitely a crazy time for teachers, and probably for every other occupation, as well. But there is so much that I want to know about what you all are doing.

But community is a funny thing, particularly as we become more technologically isolated from one another, yet more virtually close. I am a prose writer, crossing perpetually between poetry and fiction, but with both those notions (poetry and fiction) mutating every time I leave one for the other, such that I return, but usually someplace unfamiliar, creating new questions in writing—which is awesome for work, and even teaching, but not conducive to community. The poets have been kind, but am I really writing for them? Haven't I become more entrenched in questions of character and event that really don't concern poets at the level of their own writing? Where are the prose writers? It's another dispersed calling. I start a press with the hope of gathering, and it works to some extent, but it doesn't create a place in time. Community is important to my work and to my thinking of myself as a person in the world, but community in writing feels evasive, like peace, like where is it? Can you touch it?

The reader. The reader is walking down the streets of a new city, knowing the basic things one knows about cities, perhaps bearing a general map. But she's out because she's seeking adventure, or looking for something, or just trying to get oriented. I think if the reader does not expect to immediately know or obtain or see himself, then he could have fun, or at least prosper from his exhaustion.

TYRONE WILLIAMS: Having grown up in the pre-PC (if not pre-p.c.) era of letters and envelopes, I experienced community as a traditional, geographi-

cally based one—specifically, the Cass Corridor in and around Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan. A refuge for the disenfranchised and disenchanted of all races (not just, though predominantly, Black and White), classes, and sexualities, the Corridor allowed me to explore avant-garde literature (e.g., the *LINES* Series at the Detroit Institute of Arts), jazz (e.g., Sun Ra at Cobb's Corner), and radical politics (dominated by anarchists, Marxists, socialists, and, for a short time, the *RNA*), all of which intersected with, overlapped, my academic education. But when I left Detroit at the cusp of the age of the ubiquitous PC/e-mail, I found neither traditional (geographical) nor "new" (electronic) communities. So, for a long time, I did not have a sense of what others were doing except by chance, by luck. So the absence and dream of a putative community defines the title and contents of my first book, *c.c.* Here in the southern part of the Midwest I did not have a real sense of avant-garde, much less experimental (to say nothing of radical), art, politics, etc. Only with my growing proficiency with electronic modes of communication and access did I come across scattered, isolated sites of "activity" in northern Ohio (Cleveland); Louisville, Kentucky; and, of course, Chicago, Illinois. Between my move here in 1983 and my first book in 2002, almost twenty years passed, with only occasional lines of communication established....

MENDI OBADIKE: To go back to the start of this forum, I've been thinking a lot about how and when experimentation is received, what it is, and what it's valued for. I realize that these days I am kind of turned off by the label "experimental" because it feels cliquish—while I am often attracted to artists who are labeled experimental. Though I think there really is something to the conscious act of experimenting, and may even think that all artists aren't invested in experimenting to the same degree, sometimes the label seems to devalue the creativity of folks who engage in received forms. And I always want to ask: which received forms are received as received? What kinds of experimentation are being overlooked? Finally, while I often ask myself if I should put a fence around the kinds

of explorations I will and won't engage (and answer myself: NO!) what business it is of mine—as a reader—what forms and practices another artist engages? What I mean is, isn't the real question whether I can be an experimental *reader* when I'm in the act of reading? Unless she is a friend of mine, or a person in my orbit who somehow speaks to me, or a person whom I'm researching, unless she is a person whose biography I care about for some reason, I'm not sure I get invested in whether the writer of a specific poem has a governing aesthetic of experimentation or just an experimental poem.

But I can say that in my friendships with artists, I'm interested in their experimental readings. Sitting next to Dawn Lundy Martin in a workshop at Cave Canem for a week, for example, gave me a new way of thinking about my desire as a reader. I remember her writing notes about the kinds of line breaks she preferred in my poems—some of which were and some of which were not big-*e* “EXPERIMENTAL.” Most important for me was getting to see the ways she engaged with *other* writers' poems in front of me. I remember seeing her read a narrative pastoral poem by another writer and go to the places where the writer had said something interesting about the limits of language in getting at some idea. For me, this was incredibly useful. This kind of reading is the kind of reading I look for, and is more of what I try to track in my travels as far as governing aesthetics go. I mean, of course I could trace this mode of reading from Dawn's workshop critiques all the way to and through her poems, but my point is that when I think of writers' experiments these days, I'm most interested in experimental writing as the trace of experimental reading—that is, as a document of an artist's attempts at engaging more heavily and more fruitfully with that which confounds or gets easily obscured. In that sense, each and every case is its own wonderful thing.

In regard to your question about community, I have to start by saying that growing up and having my entire education in the South (outside of four really influential developmental years of a preschool run by hippies

in Palo Alto) has definitely had an impact on my work. I work with my husband, Keith, who is also a Southerner—more of one, actually, if you are one of those people who believes you have to be born there to be a real Southerner.

We made some of our first conceptual net.art works about being far away from community, and while some of that was about being in North Carolina and missing people in Georgia and Tennessee, the realities of the geography definitely came to play there. If we had been that far away from people in the Northeast, we could have easily just caught a train. But more importantly, the arts institutions that would sometimes program experimental artists from New York weren't supporting local experiments in the way that arts institutions tend to do in the Northeast. That said, I was introduced to a lot of great experimental work that I found really inspiring. And the feeling that it wasn't abundant made me really appreciate the ability to study. I had a great community of artists in North Carolina whose minds were really open, I had access to great libraries and bookstores. Most impressive to me now are the video shops and video libraries, the likes of which I have not seen since I've moved to the Northeast. I watch so so so so so so many documentaries about artists. In the Northeast, I've found collaborating much easier, in part because there are a lot of local institutions invested in supporting new work and new forms and local artists of different stripes. But I find communities can sometimes be a little more conservative around keeping to camps. It is easier to create a public conversation around aesthetics or even a particular aesthetic, but I think when a given public conversation becomes dominant in a local scene, it is not always the most fruitful investigation, even if that conversation is labeled "experimental."

ROWAN RICARDO PHILLIPS: First, count me as the second kid of a truck driver in this forum, Tyrone. And speaking of being a kid, I actually wanted to be a painter and not a writer. As a child growing up in New York City, I

suppose I never thought of being a painter as something someone actually does, I never thought of it as a trajectory for my life. But I loved to paint, and now when I think of how and what I write—nocturnes, cityscapes, tonal impressions of events instead of extrapolations from narratives, a faith in the idea that I can make a word (in whatever language) behave as color would or could—I can't help but think that the painter I left behind as a child is at work. Going back briefly to parentage, Mendi really struck a chord in me when talking about her relationship with the South, her time as a child in Palo Alto, her time in the northeast and—of course—with Keith. I've never lived in the South, but my parents are from far far south: Antigua. I'm one of those kids from the Northeast Corridor without a flat accent (no hint of the West Indies in it) but a great ear for accents, a great capacity for mimicry, and a mouth full of expressions that sometimes require translation. And I can spot a kid like me from a mile away. I'm not shocked any longer by how many scholars (and rappers) of my generation, at least in the Northeast, are first-generation Caribbean American. I wonder if there's a form of innovation (by no means to imply improvement, but rather hybrid growth) at work in the transitioning from back and forth from Caribbean to American. After all, the language is the same but different—you don't have the music playing normally, but you know how to access it and imitate it in a way that becomes yours; you are Black but your Blackness operates in a context that makes you part of a series of moving racial and social concentric circles; at times the particular Black self you're assumed to be by others is diaphanous and brittle (was anyone else in the forum asked when they were younger for their reflections on some Black Southern text that your class was reading in school?); and you wade in your own idiosyncratic conflicts, jokes, etc.... West Indian at times collapses into Jamaican as people tend to forget the Lower Antilles—hint: don't call an Antiguan a Jamaican. Ever, if you can avoid it. I'm just sayin'. When you have this mutable way of being in terms of the language, the social codes, and even race itself, experiment perhaps becomes the most suitable way to understand the shifts of self and the music of the self.

MENDI OBADIKE: So interesting, and this reminds me, Rowan, how struck I was when I took an immigrant women's lit course in college. It was the first time I ever recognized some parts of myself in literature, not because my folks weren't American, but because they didn't seem to understand what I thought were really basic things about relations in the South. I had to translate. California was changing while we were away. We were supposed to stay for nine months, but their friends called and said, "It's too bad. Don't come back." So they never did. Their lives were never the same. My life was not what they expected for me. I still remember the fear and horror on their faces the first time I said the word "y'all." I was losing my language. They started talking, that very moment (I was midsentence), about moving back to California. All my life I thought I was the only person with this kind of experience. And even after realizing that other people were having parallel experiences, it doesn't always register to me (1) how much the mysteries of language—of taking up a foreign/not foreign tongue—marks my writing, and (2) how much my sense of finding my tribe in literature probably influences my desire to be a writer. I don't know if this has anything to do with my desire to *experiment* with language, but I can see how this experience helps me not stop myself from experimenting.

FRED MOTEN: I apologize for being out of it for so long. I got swamped with admissions applications and fellowship applications and all kinds of other good stuff and all kinds of other kids' stuff. The time I had for reading and writing was broken and broken into, and I haven't devised a form for interruption like Ed Roberson.

I was going to respond to Renee's question concerning what we do or who we are in the moment that we sit down to write, but I got sidetracked. What I would have said is that, at that moment, I always seem to get sidetracked. Something always happens or intervenes. I have to find a book about a triceratops or I remember that I was supposed to put a letter of recommendation in the mail three days ago. Late at night I sit down

to *revise* what had been borne to and broken into by the interruptions. Can a normal compositional self—and I know this is the last thing on Renee's mind, or at least not what she is after ... or, Renee, if you are after it, you're chasing it in order to get past or go through it or moving through and after its sad and fictive fact—withstand that kind of duress? I have really enjoyed the brief, sharp pleasure of reading everybody thinking so lyrically about our writing. These have been stolen moments for me, and is it too presumptuous of me to say that this is what we all write for and out of? That this constraint, this refuge, is the (Black) experiment?

JOHN KEENE: You all have introduced so much great mind food—super-saturation, apostrophe, fugitive poetics, the messy lyric, the Cass Corridor, dirt, feedback and buzz, Negr'own critical theory, syntax as a city, mud sentencing and mud-syntactics, the lower Antilles (and the repeating islands?), poeisis interruptus (a bit of linguistic miscegenation, I know) and duress, and so much else—that I'm still digesting it as I try to stay above the endlessly incoming tide of work-related reading and so forth.

I'm going to restate something Evie's heard me note before, and which I know we all know but which sometimes gets lost in the shuffle: from the beginning, avant-gardes of various sorts haven't been only about formal experimentation, but the formal experimentation tends to be a manifestation of and complement to political aims, often utopian. Experimentation isn't just a reaction against, but as others on here have said, a movement towards. This isn't to say there's a common political aim among us as much as the political is there, and it's implicit in part in what I've seen everyone talking about here in different ways. One little idea I'm still fond of, even if it's passé, is the idea of the not-yet-consciousness, the not-yet-become, that exists in so much work, so much experimental work—the horizon of possibility and change, social, political, economic, critical, aesthetic, condensed and existing sometimes as just a substrate, in the work itself. The work works towards that. When I think of the work of everyone in

this forum, and so many artists I admire, that potential is there, or the aim towards it is there, even if we don't always see it right away.

Speaking more personally, I've been an active member of particular groups (high school and college lit/art journals, the Dark Room Collective, stints at various periodicals, now Cave Canem) with experimental and avant-garde bents and subsets, but long before that—and this brings me back to what Tyrone was saying—I would read or read about other artists and create these imaginary communities, families, affinities, and affiliations, for myself (go through my phases), and this continues. Even as a kid I was envisioning myself as part of communities within and beyond the ones I lived in, in dialogue with artists living and long dead, phantom, phantasmal. And I've been fortunate to see some of these communities become real, to live in some of the same cities and move through the same spaces as these new families, but I know that often the only ways I can touch them are through the acts of putting words in a letter or e-mail—ideas in play, work in the world. By dreaming and continuing to dream up conversations, forums, that may someday be realized even if only through reading and entering their—your—work.

Rowan mentions the relationship between Caribbeanness and Americanness, in dialogue with Mendi, and that made me think about how I often feel like I'm writing in a foreign language: English. Even beyond codeswitching, I sometimes feel like I'm actively translating, like I'm moving between a foreign tongue and my own alien one. What about the experience of raising your hand in junior high to comment about some text in American literature (like *Huckleberry Finn*, to take one example), and, being the only Black person in the room, you speak but aren't heard? The words enter the air and disappear.... Which made me think it wasn't me, but perhaps the language itself, my use of it, that was the point at which to do some work. Bringing that into the writing is important, too.

Fred's comment about interruptions was illuminating with regard to the moment before writing, of conceptualization. I think about being in the thrall of the concept of the work, its evolving structure and forms, what these contain and cannot hold, and how I make them or don't; not utterance, not the page, not identification, but it's all about what's in that moving vector between the staging ground of mind and what results, the fault I'm always recrossing. Or, to put it another way, constellations. As for audience, I like what Tyrone says, and I will just say that I keep in mind that I should never take my readers for granted.

Because our readers are, I hope, among many others, us.

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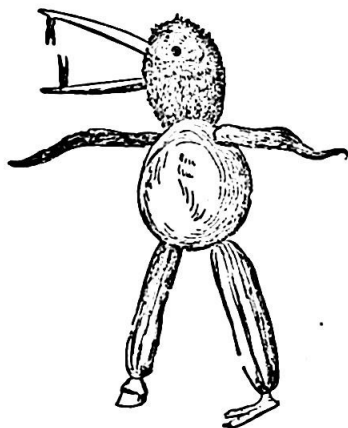
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